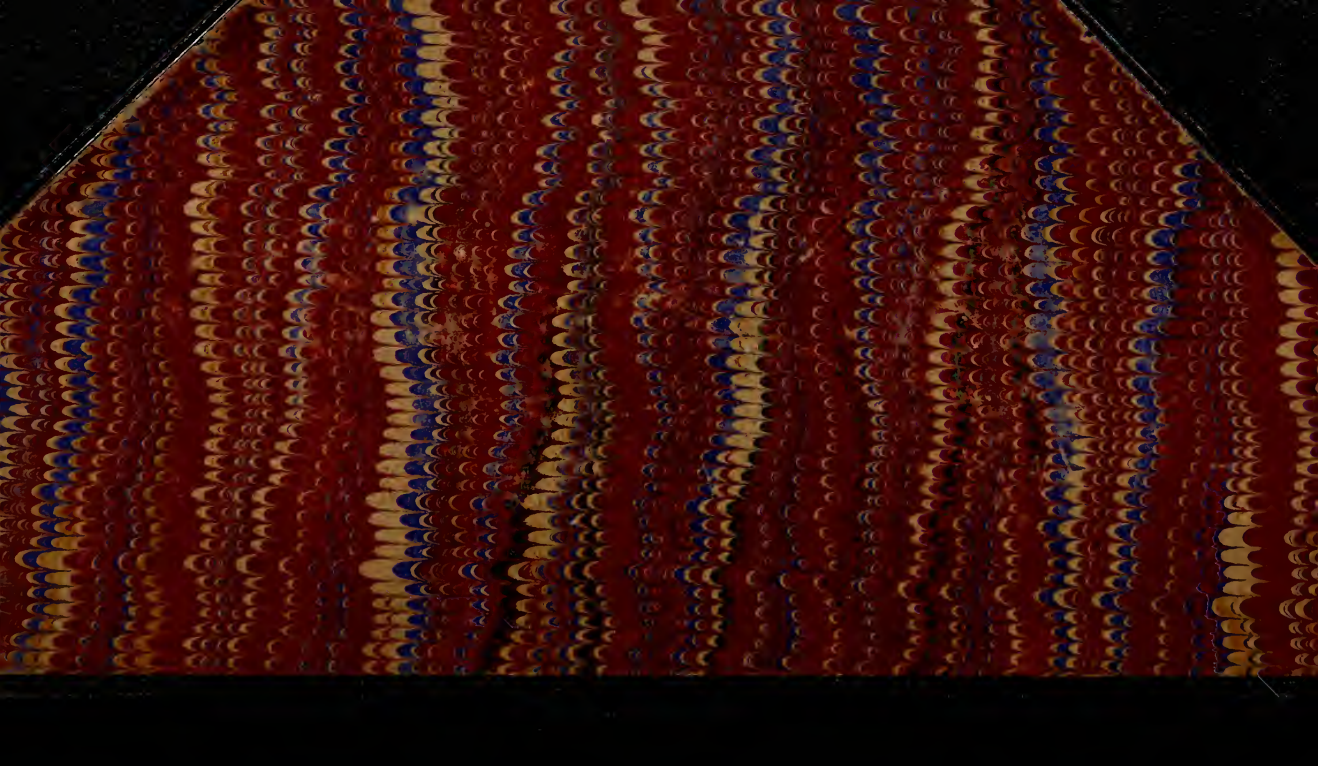

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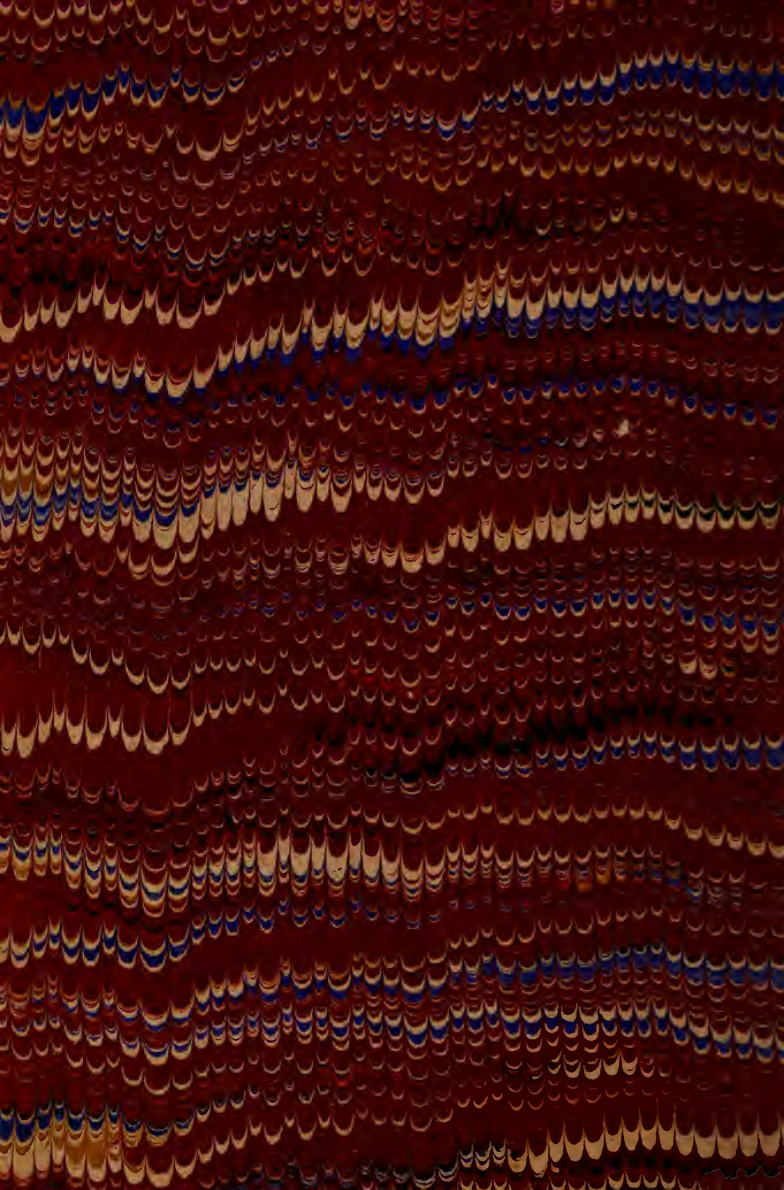

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CERISE

A TALE OF THE LAST CENTURY.

BY

G. J. WHYTE MELVILLE,

AUTHOR OF

"THE GLADIATORS," "DIGBY GRAND," "THE BROOKES OF BRIDLEMERE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CERISE:

A TALE OF THE LAST CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

LADY HAMILTON.

THE daisies we string in chains before ten, we tread under foot without compunction after twenty. Cerise, pacing a noble terrace rolled and levelled beneath the windows of her husband's home, gave no thought to the humble petals bending to her light footfall, and rising again when it passed on; gave no thought to the flaring hollyhocks, the crimson roses, all the bright array of autumn's gaudier flowers flaunting about her in the imposing splendour of maturity; gave no thought even to the fair expanse of moor and meadow, dale and dingle, copse and corn-field, wood, wold, and water, on which her eyes were bent.

She might have travelled many a mile, too, even through beautiful England, without beholding such a scene. Overhead, the sky, clear and pure in the late summer, or the early autumn, seemed but of a deeper blue, because flecked here and there with wind-swept streaks of misty white. Around her glowed, in Nature's gaudiest patchwork, all the garden beauty that had survived July. On a lower level by a few inches lay a smooth, trim bowling-green, dotted with its unfinished game; and downward still, foot by foot, like a wide green staircase, row after row of terraces were banked, and squared, and spread between their close-cut black yew hedges, till they descended to the ivy-grown wall that divided pleasure-ground from park. Here, slopes of tufted grass, swelling into bolder outlines as they receded, rolled, like the volume of a freshening sea, into knolls, and dips, and ridges, feathered in waving fern—dotted with goodly oaks—traversed by deep, narrow glades, in which the deer were feeding—shy, wild and undisturbed. Beyond this, again, the variegated plain, rich in orchards, hedgerows, and enclosures studded with shocks of corn, seamed too by the silver of more than one glistening stream, was girdled by a belt of purple moorland; while, in the far distance, the horizon was shut in by a long

low range of hills, lost in a grey-blue vapour, where they melted into sky.

Behind her stood the grim and weather-worn mansion, with its thick stone walls, dented, battered, and defaced, as if it had defied a thousand tempests and more than one siege, which, indeed, was the fact. Every old woman in the country-side could tell how the square grey keep, at the end of the south wing, had resisted the Douglas, and there was no mistaking Cromwell's handwriting on more than one rent in the comparatively modern portions of the building. Hamilton Hill, though it had never been called a fort, a castle, or even a hall, was known far and wide for a stronghold, that, well supplied and garrisoned, might keep fifty miles of the surrounding district in check; and the husband of Cerise was now lord of Hamilton Hill.

No longer the soldier adventurer, the leader of Grey Musketeers, compound of courtier and bravo—no longer the doubtful skipper of a suspicious craft, half-trader, half-pirate—Sir George Hamilton, with position, property, tenants, and influence, found himself a very different person from the Captain George who used to relieve guard at the Palais Royal, and lay "The Bashful Maid" broadside on to

a Spanish galleon deep in the water, with her colours down and her foresail aback, a rich prize and an easy prey. Ere the brigantine had dropped her anchor in the first English port she made, George received intelligence of his far-off kinsman's death, and his own succession to a noble inheritance. It came at an opportune moment, and he was disposed to make the most of it. Therefore it was that Cerise (now Lady Hamilton) looked from the lofty terrace over many a mile of fair English scenery, much of which belonged, like herself, to the man she loved.

They were fairly settled now, and had taken their established place—no lowly station—amongst their neighbours. Precedence had not, indeed, been yielded them without a struggle; for in the last as in the present century, detraction claimed a fair fling at all new-comers, and not what they were, but *who* they were, was the important question amongst a provincial aristocracy, who made up by minute inquiry for the limited sphere of their research. At first people whispered that the husband was an adventurer and the wife an actress. Well, if not an actress, at least a dancing-girl, whom he had picked up in Spain, in Paris, in the West Indies, at Tangiers, Tripoli, or Japan!

Lady Hamilton's beauty, her refined manners, her exquisite dresses, warranted the meanest opinion of her in the minds of her own sex; and although, when they could no longer conceal from themselves that she was a Montmirail of the real Montmirails, they were obliged to own she had at least the advantage of high birth, I doubt if they loved her any better than before. They pitied Sir George, they said, one and all—"He, if you like, was charming. He had been page to the great King; he had been adored by the ladies of the French Court; he had killed a Prince of the Blood in a duel; he had sacked a convent of Spanish nuns, and wore the rosary of the Lady Abbess under his waistcoat; he had been dreadfully wicked, but he was so polite! he had the *bel air;* he had the *tourneur Louis Quatorze;* he had the manners of the princes, and the electors, and the archdukes now passing away. Such men would be *impossible* soon; and to think he could have been entrapped by that tawdry Frenchified Miss, with her airs and graces, her fans and furbelows, and yards of the best Mechlin lace on the dress she went gardening in! It was nothing to *them,* of course, that the man should have committed such an absurdity; but, in common humanity, they could

not help being sorry for it, and, unless they were very much deceived, so was he!"

With the squires, again, and county grandees of the male sex, including two or three baronets, a knight of the shire, and the lord-lieutenant himself, it was quite different. These honest gentlemen, whether fresh and fasting in the morning, or bemused with claret towards the afternoon, prostrated themselves before Cerise, and did homage to her charms. Her blue eyes, her rosy lips, the way her gloves fitted, the slender proportions of her feet, the influence of her soft, sweet manner, resulting from a kindly, innocent heart—above all, the foreign accent, which added yet another grace, childish, mirth-inspiring, and bewitching, to everything she said—caused men of all ages and opinions to place their necks voluntarily beneath the yoke. They swore by her; they toasted her; they broke glasses innumerable in her honour; they vowed, with repeated imprecations, nothing had ever been seen like her before; and they held out to her husband the right hand of fellowship, as much for her sake as for his own.

Sir George's popularity increased on acquaintance. A man who could fly a hawk with science—who could kill his game on the wing—who could ride

any horse perfectly straight over any part of their country—who seemed to care very little for politics, except in so far as that the rights of *venerie* should be protected—who was reputed a consummate swordsman, and seen, on occasion, to empty his bottle of claret with exceeding good-will—was not likely to remain long in the background amongst the hardy northern gentlemen with whom his lot was cast. Very soon Sir George Hamilton's society was sought as eagerly by both sexes, as his wife's beauty was admired by the one and envied—shall I say denied?—by the other.

Notwithstanding female criticism, which female instinct may possibly rate at its true value, Cerise found herself very happy. Certainly, the life she led was very different from that to which she had been accustomed in her youth. An English lady of the last century devoted much of her time to duties that are now generally performed by a housekeeper, and Cerise had resolved to become a thorough English lady, simply, I imagine, because she thought it would please George. So she rose early, inspected the dairies, betrayed contemptible ignorance in the manufacture of butter and cream, reviewed vast stores of linen, put her white arms through a coarse canvas apron, and splashed little

dabs of jam upon her delicate nose, with the conviction that she was a perfectly competent and efficient housewife. Such occupations, if more healthy, were certainly less exciting than the ever-recurring gaieties of the family hotel in Paris, less agreeable than the luxurious tropical indolence of Montmirail-West.

There were servants, plenty of them, at Hamilton Hill, who would literally have shed their blood in defence of their mistress, but they showed neither the blind obedience of the negro nor the shrewd readiness of the Parisian domestic. On the contrary, they seemed persuaded that length of service entitled them to be obstinate, perverse, and utterly negligent of orders. There were two or three seniors of whom Lady Hamilton positively stood in awe, and an old grey-headed butler, perfectly useless from gout and obesity, would expostulate angrily with his mistress for walking bareheaded on the terrace in an east wind. That same east wind, too, was another trial to Cerise. It gave her cold, it made her shiver, and she was almost afraid it sometimes made her cross. There were drawbacks, you see, even to a love-match, a fortune, and Hamilton Hill!

Yet she was very happy. She continually repeated

to herself how happy she was. To be sure, she missed her mother's society, missed it far more than she expected when at first she acquired the freedom of the Matron's Guild. Perhaps, too, she may have missed the incense of flattery so delicately offered at the receptions of the Marquise; nay, even the ponderous and well-turned compliments of the Prince-Marshal, who, to do him justice, treated her with a chivalrous affection, compounded of romantic devotion to her mother, and paternal regard for herself. But I am sure she would never have allowed that a drop could be wanting in the full cup of her happiness, for was not George the whole world to her, and had she not got him here all to herself?

She walked thoughtfully on the terrace, surrounded by the glorious beauty of earth and sky, looking, and seeing not. Perhaps she was back in Touraine amongst the vineyards, perhaps she was in the shady Convent Garden, cooling her temples in the pure fresh breeze that whispered to the beeches, how it had gathered perfumes from the orchards and the hedgerows and the scented meadows of pleasant Normandy. Perhaps she was rustling through a minuet in the same set with a Daughter of France, or fanning mamma in the hot West Indian evening,

or straining her eyes to windward from the deck of "The Bashful Maid," with George's arm round her waist, and his telescope pointing to the distant sail, that seemed plain to every eye on board but hers. At any rate, she appeared to be leagues off in mind, though her dainty feet with slow, measured steps were pacing to and fro on the terrace at Hamilton Hill. All at once her colour came, her eyes sparkled, she brightened up like one who wakes from sleep, for her heart still leaped to the tramp of boot and jingle of spur, as it had leaped in the days gone by, when a certain musketeer would visit his guard at unseasonable hours, that he might have an excuse for passing under her window.

She ran across the terrace to meet him with a little exclamation of delight. "How long you have been, George!" she said, smiling up in his face. "*Why* did you not ride faster? It is so dull here without *you*."

She had him by the arm, and clasped her pretty white hands across his sleeve, leaning her weight on his wrist. He looked affectionately down in the fair young face, but he had come at a gallop for five or six miles across the moor, as the state of his boots no less than his flushed face indicated, and he did not feel inclined to admit he had been dilatory, so

his answer was less that of the lover than the husband.

"Dull! Cerise. I am sorry you find this place so dull, seeing that you and I must spend the greater part of our lives here. I thought you liked England, and a country life!"

Why is a man flattered by those exactions in a mistress that gall him so in a wife? Perhaps it is because a generous nature concedes willingly the favour, but is stern to resist the claim. When his mistress says she cannot do without him, all the protective instincts, so strong in masculine affection, rise in her behalf, but the same sentiment expressed by one who assumes a right to his time and attention, rather awakes a sense of apprehension, and a spirit of revolt. Where woman only sees the single instance, man establishes the broad principle. If he yields on this occasion, he fears his time will never again be his own, and such misgivings show no little ignorance of the nature with which he has to deal, a nature to be guided rather than taught, persuaded rather than convinced, sometimes advised, but never confuted, and on which close reasoning is but labour thrown away. I think that woman wise who is careful never to weary her husband. The little god thrives well on smiles, and is seldom

stronger than when in tears. While he frowns and sets his teeth, he is capable of a lion's efforts and a mule's endurance; but when he begins to yawn, he is but like other children, and soon falls fast asleep.

Cerise hated George to speak to her in that grave tone. It grated on the poor girl's nerves, and frightened her besides, which was indeed unreasonable, for he had never said a harsh word to her in his life. She looked timidly in his face, and answered meekly enough.

"Every place is dull to me, George, without you. I wish I could be always with you—to help you with the tenants, to dine with you at the Court House, to sit behind you on Emerald when you go for a gallop across the moor. Why could I not ride with you this morning?"

He laughed good-humouredly, and stroked the hands clasped on his wrist.

"It would have been the very thing, Cerise!" said he. "I think I see you assisting at a cock-fight, placing the fowls, picking them up, and counting them out! I think I can see Sir Marmaduke's face when you walked into the pit. I think I can hear the charitable remarks of all our county ladies, who are not disposed to let you off more easily, my dear, because you are so much better-

looking and better dressed than anything they ever saw north of the Trent. Yes, my darling, come to the next cock-fight by all means. *Il ne manquerait que ça!*"

The little French sentence was music to her ears. It was the language in which he had wooed her; and though she spoke *his* language now assiduously, and spoke it well, the other was her mother-tongue. She laughed, too.

"Perhaps I shall take you at your word," said she, "though it is a cruel, horrid, wicked amusement. Did you win, George?"

"Fifty gold pieces!" was his answer; "and the same on a return match next week, which I am equally sure of. They will get you two new dresses from Paris."

"I want no dresses from Paris," said she, drawing him towards the bowling-green. "I want you to help me in my garden. Come and look at my Provençe roses."

But Sir George had no time to spare even for so tempting a pursuit. A fresh horse was even now waiting to carry him ten miles off to a training of the *militia*, in which constitutional force, as became his station, he took a proper interest. He was the country gentleman now from head to heel, and fre-

quented all gatherings and demonstrations in which country gentlemen take delight. Of these, a cock-fight was not the most refined, but it was the fashion of his time and his class, so we must not judge him more severely than did Cerise, who, truth to tell, thought he could not possibly do wrong, and would have given him absolution for a worse crime, in consideration of his accompanying her to the garden to look at her Provençe roses.

"To-morrow," said he; husbandlike, missing the chance of a compliment about the roses, which a lover would not have let slip; the latter, indeed, if obliged to depart, would probably have ridden away with one of the flowers in his bosom. "To-morrow, Cerise. I have a press of business to-day, but will get back in time for dinner;" and touching her forehead lightly with his lips, Sir George was gone before she could stop him, and in another minute his horse's hoofs were clattering out of the stable-yard.

From the terrace where she stood, Cerise watched his receding figure as he galloped merrily down the park, knee-deep in fern, threading the old oaks, and sending the deer scampering on all sides across the open, watched him with a cloud upon her young face, and a quiver about her mouth, that was near

akin to tears; watched long after he was out of sight, and then turned wearily away with a languid step and a deep-drawn sigh.

She was but going through the ordeal that sooner or later must be endured by every young wife who dearly loves her husband. She was but learning the unavoidable lesson that marriage is not courtship, that reality is not illusion, that the consistent tenderness of a husband, if more practical, is less flattering than the romantic adoration of a lover. She was beginning to shape into suspicion certain vague misgivings which had lately haunted her, that although George was all the world to *her*, she was only part of the world to George! It is from the sweetest dreams that we are most unwilling to awake, and therefore it is no wonder that Lady Hamilton's preoccupation prevented her observing a strange horseman riding up the avenue, slowly and laboriously, as though after a long journey, of which the final destination seemed to be Hamilton Hill.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH.

IN the year 1540, five Spaniards and a Savoyard, styling themselves "Clerks of the Company of Jesus," left Paris under the leadership of the famous Ignatius Loyola, to found an establishment at Rome.

Here Pope Paul III. presented them with a church, and in return these half-dozen of energetic priests gave in an unqualified adhesion to the Sovereign Pontiff. Their avowed intention in thus forming themselves into a separate and independent body (except in so far as they owed allegiance to its supreme head), was the propagation of the Roman Catholic faith, the conversion of heathens, the suppression of heresy, and the education of the young. For these purposes a system was at once

organized, which should combine the widest sphere of action, with the closest surveillance over its agents, the broadest views with the most minute attention to details, an absolute unquestioned authority, with a staunch and implicit obedience. To attain universal rule (possibly for a good motive, but at any sacrifice to attain it) over the opinions of humanity, however different in age, sex, character, and nationalities, was the object proposed, and almost the first maxim laid down, and never departed from in the Order, established that all means were justifiable to such an end. It was obvious that to win universal dominion over the moral as over the physical world, every effort must not only be vigorous, but combined and simultaneous, such waste of power must never be contemplated as the possibility of two forces acting in opposite directions, and therefore a code of discipline must be established, minute, stringent, and comprehensive, like that of an army before an enemy, but with this difference, that its penalties must never be modified by circumstances, nor its bonds relaxed by conquest or defeat. In the Order of Jesus must be no speaking, no questioning, no individuality, and—no forgiveness!

Their constitution was as follows: A "Gene-

ral," as he was styled, resided in perpetuity at Rome, and from that central spot sent forth his directions over the whole civilized world, enjoying absolute authority and exacting unqualified obedience. Even to the supreme head, however, was attached an officer entitled his "Admonisher." It was his duty to observe the conduct of his chief, and report on it to the five "Assistants," who constituted that chief's council. These, again, were instructed to watch each other carefully, and thus, not even at the very head and fountain of supreme authority, could any single individual consider himself a free agent, even in the most trifling matters of dress, deportment, or daily conversation.

In every country where the Jesuits obtained a footing (and, while there are few in which they have not been notoriously powerful, even in those which betray no traces of their presence, who shall say their influence has not been at work below the surface?) a "Provincial," as he was called, assumed the direction of affairs within a certain district, and on his administration every one of his subordinates, temporal and spiritual, was instructed to report. There were three degrees in the Order, according to the experience and utility of its votaries—these were "Professors," "Coadjutors," both priests and

laymen, for their ramifications extended from the highest to the lowest, through all classes of society, and "Novices."

To enter the Order, many severe examinations had to be passed, and while it numbered among its votaries men of superlative abilities in a thousand different callings, every member was employed according to his capacity of useful service.

With such an organization it may be imagined that the society has been a powerful engine for good and for evil. It has planted Christianity in the most remote corners of the earth, and has sent missionaries of skill, eloquence, piety, and dauntless courage, amongst savages who, otherwise, might never have heard the faintest echo of the Glad Tidings, in which all men claim interest alike; but, on the other hand, it has done incalculable mischief in the households of Christian Europe, has wormed itself into the confidence of women, has destroyed the concord of families, has afforded the assailants of religion innumerable weapons of offence, and in its dealings with those whom it was especially bound to succour and protect, has brought on them desolation rather than comfort, remorse where there should be hope, and war instead of peace.

It is necessary to remember the effect of a con-

stant and reciprocal supervision, not only on the outward actions and conduct, but on the very thoughts and characters of men unavoidably fettered by its influence, to understand the position of two priests walking side by side along one of the narrow level banks that intersect the marshy country lying near the town of St. Omer.

These old friends, if, indeed, under such conditions as theirs, men can ever be termed friends, had not met since they sat together many years before, beneath the limes at Versailles, when the younger had not yet taken orders, and the elder, although he accepted the title of Abbé, neither led the life of an ecclesiastic, nor admitted openly that he was in any way amenable to the discipline observed by the Jesuits. Now, both were ostensibly votaries of the Order. Its impress might be seen in their measured steps, their thoughtful faces, and their downward looks, taking no heed of the peaceful scene around: the level marshes, the ripening orchards, the lazy cattle knee-deep in rich wet herbage, the peasant's punt pushed drowsily and sluggishly along the glistening ditches that divided his fields, the mellow warmth of the autumnal sun, and the swarms of insects wheeling in his slanting, reddening rays.

They saw, or at least they heeded, none of this—deep in conversation, their subject seemed of engrossing interest; yet each looked only by stealth in the other's face, withdrawing his glance and bending it on the path at his feet, the instant it met his friend's.

At times neither spoke for several paces, and it was during such periods of silence that the expression of habitual mistrust and constraint became painfully apparent. In the elder man it was softened and smoothed over, partly by effort, partly by the acquired polish of society, but the younger seemed to chafe with repressed ardour, like a rash horse, impatient but generous, fretting under the unaccustomed curb.

After a longer pause than usual, this one spoke with more energy than he had yet displayed.

"I only wish to do *right*. What is it to me, Malletort, that the world should misjudge me, or that I should sink in the esteem of those whose good opinion I value? I only wish to do right, I say, always in compliance with the orders of my superiors."

The other smiled. "In the first place," said he, "you must not call me Malletort, at least not within so short a distance of those college chimneys; but we will let that pass; for though a novice, still you

are worthy of speedy promotion, and it is only for 'Novices' in the first period of probation that our rules are so exacting. You wish to do right. So be it. You have done very wrong hitherto, or you might have been a 'Provincial' by this time. Well, my son, confession is the first step to amendment, and then——"

He paused, and bit his lip. It was difficult to keep down the old sarcastic smile, but he did it, and looked gravely in the other's face.

"Penance!" replied the younger. "I know it too well. Ah! *mea culpa! mea culpa!* I have been a great sinner. I have repented in sackcloth and ashes. I have confessed freely. I wish, yes, I repeat, I *wish* to atone humbly, and yet, oh! for mercy's sake, tell me, is there no way but this?"

His agony of mind was too apparent on his face. Even Malletort felt a momentary compunction when he remembered the hopeful enthusiastic youth who had sat with him under the limes at Versailles all those years ago; when he remembered the desperate career on which he had embarked, his insubordination, his apostacy, and those paroxysms of remorse that drove him back into the bosom of the church. Could this depressed and miserable penitent be the once bright and happy Florian de St. Croix,

and had he been brought to this pass, simply because he possessed such inconvenient superfluities as a heart and a conscience? Malletort, I say, felt a twinge of compunction, but of pity very little, of indecision not one bit.

"Would you go to a doctor," said he, gravely, "and teach him how to cure you of a deadly malady? Would you choose your own medicine, my son, and refuse the only healing draught prescribed, because it was bitter to the taste? There is but one way of retracing your steps. You must go back along the very path that led you into evil. That the effort will be trying, I admit. All uphill work is trying to the utmost, but how else can men attain the summit? That the task is painful I allow, but were it pleasant, where would be the penance? Besides, you know our rules, my son, the time is not far off when I shall be permitted to say, my brother. We have got you. Will you dare to hesitate ere you obey?"

An expression of intense fear came over Florian's face, but it seemed less the physical fear of danger from without, than an absorbing dread of the moral enemy within.

"I *must* obey," he answered in a low voice, shuddering while he spoke. "I *must* obey, I know,

readily, willingly. Alas! Malletort, there is my unforgiven sin, my mortal peril. *Too* willingly do I undertake the task. It is my dearest wish to find myself addressed to it—that is why I entreat not to be sent—that is why I implore them to spare me. It is my soul that is in danger. Heart, hope, happiness, home, liberty, identity, all are gone from me, and now I shall lose my soul."

"Your soul!" repeated the other, again repressing a sneer. "Do not distress yourself, my son, about your soul. It is in very safe keeping, and your superiors are, doubtless, the best judges of its value and eventual destination. In the meantime, do not give way to a far-fetched casuistry, or a morbid delicacy of sentiment. If your heart is in your task, and you go to it willingly, it will be the more easily and the more effectually accomplished. Congratulate yourself, therefore, that your penance is not distasteful as well as dangerous, a torture of bodily weakness, rather than a trial of spiritual strength. Remember, there is no sin of action where there is none of intention. There can be none of intention where a deed is done simply in compliance with the Superior's will. If that deed be pleasurable, it is but so much gained on the chances of the service. Enjoy it as you would enjoy the sun's

rays if you were standing sentry on a winter's day at the Louvre. It is not for *you*, a simple soldier of the Order, to speculate on your own merits or your own failures, those above you will take care that neither are overlooked. Eat your rations and be thankful. Your duty, first and last, is but to obey!"

It will be seen by these phrases, so carefully worded according to the rules of the Order, yet bearing the while a covert sarcasm for his own private gratification, that the real character of Malletort was but little changed, since he intrigued at the Council table or drank at the suppers of the Regency.

He was a Jesuit priest now in garb and outward semblance; he was still the clever, unscrupulous, unbelieving, pleasure-loving Abbé at the core. So necessary had he become to the Regent as the confidant of his secret schemes, whether their object were the acquisition of a province or the dismissal of a mistress, that he would have found little difficulty in making his peace with his Prince, even after the untoward failure of the Montmirail Gardens, had he chosen to do so. The Regent, maddened with disappointment, and especially sore because of the ridicule created by the whole business, turned at first fiercely enough on his

trusty adviser, but found to his surprise, that the Abbé was beforehand with him. The latter assumed an air of high-minded indignation, talked of the honour of an ancient house, of the respect due, at least in outward courtesy, to a kinswoman of his own, hinted at his fidelity and his services, protested against the ingratitude with which they had been requited, and ended by tendering his resignation, with a request for leave to absent himself from Paris. The result, as usual with the Duke of Orleans, was a compromise. His outraged servant should quit him for a time, but would remain at least faithful in heart to the master who now entreated his pardon. In a few weeks the matter, he thought, would be forgotten, and for those few weeks he must manage his own affairs without the Abbé's assistance.

Malletort had several good reasons for thus detaching himself from the Court. The first, and most important, was the state of the Duke's health. The Abbé had not failed to mark the evil effects produced even by so slight an excitement as the affair at the Hotel Montmirail. He perceived the Regent's tendency to apoplexy growing stronger day by day; he observed that the slightest emotion now caused him to flush a dark red even in the morning; and he knew that at supper his fulness of habit

was so obvious as to alarm the very *roués*, lest every draught should be his last. If sudden death were to carry off the Regent, Malletort felt all his labour would have been thrown away, and he must begin at the lowest round of the ladder again.

His connection with the Jesuits, for he had long ago enlisted himself as a secret member of that powerful Order, was now of service to him. They had influence with the advisers of the young King, they were ardent promoters of the claims to the British crown, laid by that James Stuart whom history has called the Old Pretender. It was quite possible that, under a new state of things, they might hold some of the richest rewards in France and England, to bestow on their adherents. Above all, the very key-stone of their system, the power that set all their machinery in motion, was a spirit of busy and unremitting intrigue. Abbé Malletort never breathed so freely as in an atmosphere of plots and counter-plots. With all the energy of his nature, he devoted himself to the interests of the Order, keeping up his connection with the Court, chiefly on its behalf. He was as ready now to betray the Regent to his new allies, as he had been a few months before to sacrifice honour and probity for the acquisition of that Prince's goodwill.

There are few men, however, who can thoroughly divest themselves of all personal feelings in the pursuit of their own interest. Even Malletort possessed the weaknesses of pride, pique, and certain injudicious partialities which he could not quite overcome. He hated his late patron for many reasons of his own, for none more than that his persecution had compelled Madame de Montmirail and her daughter to leave France and seek a refuge beyond the sea. If he cared for anything on earth, besides his own aggrandizement, it was his kinswoman, and when he thought of the Marquise, a smile would overspread his features that denoted anything but Christian charity or goodwill to her royal admirer.

He spent much of his time at St. Omer now, where several Provincials and other influential members of the Order were assembled, organizing a movement in favour of the so-called James III.; these were in constant correspondence with the English Jacobites, and according to their established principle, were enlisting every auxiliary, legitimate or otherwise, for the furtherance of their schemes. They possessed lists of surprising accuracy, in which were noted down the names, resources, habits, and political tendencies of many private gentlemen in

remote countries, who little dreamed they were of such importance.

An honest squire, whose ideas scarcely soared beyond his harriers, his claret, and his fat cattle, would have been surprised to learn that his character, his income, his pursuits, his domestic affections, and his habitual vices were daily canvassed by a society of priests, numbering amongst them the keenest intellects in Europe, who had travelled many hundred leagues expressly to meet in a quiet town in Artois, of which he had never heard the name, and give their opinions on himself. Perhaps his insular love of isolation would have been disgusted, and he might have been less ready to peril life and fortune, had he known the truth.

But every landholder of importance was the object of considerable discussion. It was Abbé Malletort's familiarity with previous occurrences, and the characters of all concerned, that led him now to put the pressure on the renegade who had lost his rank with his desertion, and returned in the lowest grade as a novice, to make his peace with the Order.

"My friend," resumed the Abbé, after another long silence, during which the sun had reached the horizon, and was now shedding a broad red glare on his companion's face, giving him an excuse to

shade it with his hand; "Your penance has been well begun, and needs but this one culminating effort to be fully accomplished. I have been at Rome very lately, and the General himself spoke approvingly of your repentance and your return. The Provincial at Maria Galante had reported favourably on your conduct during the disturbances in the island, and your unfeigned penitence, when you gave yourself up as a deserter from the Order. We have no secrets, you know, amongst ourselves; or rather, I should say, nothing is so secret but that it has its witnesses. Here, at Paris, in Rome, will be known all that you do in England; more, all that you leave undone. I need scarcely charge you to be diligent, trustworthy, secret; but I must warn you not to be over-scrupulous. Remember, the intention justifies the deed. It is not only expedient, but meritorious to do evil that good may come."

They were now approaching the town, and the sentry was being relieved at its fortified gate. The clash of arms, the measured tramp, the martial bearing of the soldiers, called up in Florian's mind such associations as for the moment drowned the sentiments of religious penitence and self-accusation that had lately taken possession of his heart. He

longed to throw off the priest's robe, the grave deportment, the hateful trammels of an enforced and professional hypocrisy, and to feel a man once more—a man, adventurous, free, desperate, relying for very life on the plank beneath his foot or the steel in his hand, but at least able to carry his head high amongst his fellows, and to know that were it but for five minutes, the future was his own. It was sin even to dream of such things.

"*Mea culpa, mea culpa!*" he muttered in a desponding tone, and beat his breast, and bent his eyes once more upon the ground.

"When am I to go?" said he, meekly, reverting to their previous conversation, and, abandoning as though after deep reflection, the unwillingness he had shown from the first.

"This evening, after vespers," answered the Abbé, with a scarce perceptible inflection of contempt in his voice that denoted he had read him through like a book. "You will attend as usual. Everything is prepared, even to a garb less grave than that you wear, and a good horse (ah! you cannot help smiling now) will be waiting for you at the little gate. You ought to be half-way to Calais before the moon is up."

His face brightened now, though he strove hard

to conceal his satisfaction. Here was change, freedom, excitement, liberty, at least for a time, and an adventurous journey, to terminate in *her* presence, who was still to his eyes the ideal of womankind. All, too, in the fulfilment of a penance, the execution of a duty. His heart leaped beneath his cassock, and warned him of the danger he incurred. Danger, indeed! It did but add to the intoxication of the draught. With difficulty he restrained the bounding impatience of his step, and kept his face averted from his friend.

The precaution was useless. Mallatort knew his thoughts as well as if he had been his penitent in the confessional, and laughed within himself. The tool at least was sharp and ready, quivering, highly-tempered, and flexible; it needed but a steady hand to drive it home.

"You will come to the Provincial for final instructions half an hour before you mount," said he, gravely; and added, without altering his tone or moving a muscle of his countenance, "Your especial duty is to gain over Sir George. For this object it is essential to obtain the goodwill of Lady Hamilton."

CHAPTER III.

FOR THE STAR.

HE ought to have known, he *did* know, his danger. If he was not sure of it during his ride to the coast, while he crossed the Channel, and felt the wild spray dash against his face like the greeting of an old friend, nor in the long journey that took him northward through many a smiling valley and breezy upland of that country which he had once thought so gloomy and desolate, which seemed so fair and sunny now, because it was *hers*, he ought to have realized it when he rode under the old oaks at Hamilton Hill, and dreaded, even more than he longed, to see her white dress glancing among their stems. Above all, he ought to have been warned, when, entering the house, though Lady Hamilton

herself did not appear, he felt surrounded by her presence, and experienced that sensation of repose, which, after all his tumult of anxiety and uncertainty, pervades a man's whole being in the home of the woman he loves. There were her gardening gloves, and plain straw hat, perhaps yet warm from her touch, lying near the door. There were flowers that surely must have been gathered by her hands but a few hours ago, on the table where he laid his pistols and riding-wand. There was her work set aside on a chair, her shawl thrown over its back, the footstool she had used pushed half across the floor, and an Iceland hawk, with hood, bell, and jesses, moving restlessly on the perch, doubtless in expectation of its mistress's return.

He tried hard to deceive himself, and he succeeded. He felt that in all his lawless infatuation for this pure, spotless woman, he had never loved her so well as now. Now, that she was his friend's wife! But he argued, he pleaded, he convinced himself in his madness, that such a love as his, even a husband must approve. It was an affection, he repeated, or rather a worship, completely spiritualized and self-sacrificing, to outlast the material trammels of this life, and follow her, still faithful, still changeless, into eternity. So true, so holy, however hopeless,

however foolish, could such a love as this, deprived of all earthly leaven, be criminal, even in *him*, the priest, for *her*, the wedded wife? No, no, he told himself, a thousand times, no! And all the while the man within the man, who sits, and mocks, and judges, and condemns us all, said Yes—a thousand times—Yes!

There is but one end to such debate, when the idol is under the same roof with the worshipper. He put the question from him for the present, and only resolved that, at least, he might love all belonging to her, for her sake. All, even to the very flowers she gathered, and the floor she trod. He took up the work she had set aside, and pressed it passionately to his lips, his heart, his eyes. The door opened, and he dropped it, scared, startled, guilty, like a man detected in a crime. It was a disappointment, yet he felt it a relief to find that the intruder was not Cerise. He had scarcely yet learned to call her Lady Hamilton. There was no disappointment, however, in the new-comer's face, as he stood for a moment with the door in his hand, looking at Florian with a quaint comical smile, in which respect for Sir George's guest was strangely mingled with a sailor's hearty welcome to his shipmate. The latter sentiment soon predominated,

and Slap-Jack, hurrying forward with a scrape of his foot and a profusion of sea-bows, seized the visitor by both hands, called him "my hearty!" several times over; and, finally, relapsing with considerable effort, into the staid and confidential servant of the family, offered him, in his master's absence, liquid refreshment on the spot.

"It's a fair wind, whichever way it blowed, as brought *you* here," exclaimed the late foretop-man, when the energy of his greeting had somewhat subsided; "and so the skipper, I mean Sir George, will swear, when he knows his first lieutenant's turned up in this here anchorage, and my lady too, askin' your reverence's pardon once more, being that I'm not quite so sure as I ought to be of your honour's rating."

Slap-Jack was becoming a little confused, remembering the part played by Beaudésir on the last occasion of their meeting.

"Sir George does not expect me," answered Florian, returning the seaman's greeting with cordial warmth; "but unless he is very much altered, I think his welcome will be no less hearty than your own."

"That I'll swear it will—that I'll swear he doesn't," protested Slap-Jack, taking upon himself

the character of confidential domestic more and more. "Sir George never ordered so much as a third place to be laid at dinner; but we'll make that all ship-shape with a round turn in no time; an' if you don't drink 'Sweethearts and Wives' to-day in a flagon of the best, why, say I'm a Dutchman! When I see them towing your nag into harbour, and our old purser's steward, butler, as we calls him ashore, he hails me and sings out as there's a visitor between decks, I knowed as something out of the common was aboard. I can't tell you for why; but I knowed it as sure as the compass. I haven't been so pleased since I was paid off. If it wasn't that my lady's in the room above this, and it's not discipline to disturb her, blowed if I wouldn't give three such cheers as should shake the acorns down at the far end of the west avenue. But I'll do it to-night after Quarters, see if I won't. Lieutenant Bo——, askin' your pardon, your honour's reverence."

Thus conversing, and occupying himself the whole time with the guest's comforts, for Slap-Jack, sailor-like, had not forgotten to be two-handed, he showed Florian into a handsome bed-chamber, and unpacked with ready skill the traveller's valise, taken off his horse's croup, that contained the modest

wardrobe, which in those days of equestrian journeys was considered sufficient for a gentleman's requirements. He then assured him that Sir George's arrival could not be long delayed, as dinner would be served in half an hour, and the waiting-woman had already gone up-stairs to dress her ladyship; also, that there was a sirloin of beef on the spit and ale in the cellar brewed thirty-five years ago next October; with which pertinent information he left the visitor to his toilet and his reflections.

The former was soon concluded; the latter lasted him through his labours, and accompanied him down-stairs to the great hall, where Slap-Jack had told him he would find dinner prepared. His host and hostess were already there. Of Lady Hamilton's greeting he was unconscious, for his head swam, and he dared not lift his eyes to her face; but Sir George's welcome was hearty, even boisterous. Florian could not help thinking that, had he been in the hospitable baronet's place, he would have been less delighted with the arrival of a visitor.

Whatever people's feelings may be, however, they go to dinner all the same. Slap-Jack, an old grey-headed butler, and two or three livery-servants, stood in attendance. The dishes were uncovered, and

Florian found himself seated at a round table in the centre of the fine old hall like a man in a dream, confused indeed and vaguely bewildered, yet conscious of no surprise at the novelty of his situation, and taking in all its accessories with a glance. He was aware of the stag's skeleton frontlet, crowned by its gigantic antlers, beetling, bleached, and grim, over the door; of the oak panelling and stained glass; the high carved chimney-piece, with its grotesque supporters; the vast logs smouldering in embers on the hearth; the dressed deer-skins, that served for rug or carpet wherever a covering seemed needed on the polished floor; nay, even of a full-length picture by Vandyke, representing the celebrated Count Anthony Hamilton looking his very politest, in a complete suit of plate armour, with a yard or two of cambric round his neck, and an enormous wig piling its hyacinthine curls above his forehead, to descend in coarse cascades of hair below his waist.

All this had Florian taken note of before he could conscientiously declare that he had looked his hostess in the face.

It made him start to hear the sweet voice once more—frank, cordial, and caressing as of old. One of the many charms which Cerise exercised over her

fellow-creatures, was the gentle, kindly tone in which she spoke to all.

"You have just come from France, you say, Father Ambrose. Pardon, Monsieur de St. Croix. How am I to address you? From our dear France, George. Only think! He has scarcely left it a week."

"Where they did not give you such ale as that, I'll be bound," answered Sir George, motioning Slap-Jack to fill for the guest, a hospitable rite performed by the old privateer's-man with extreme goodwill, and a solemn wink of approval, as he placed the beaker at his hand. "What! You have not learned to drink our *vin ordinaire* yet? And now, I remember, you were always averse to heavy potations. Here, fill him a bumper of claret, some of you! Taste that, my friend. I don't think we ever drank better in the 'Musketeers.' Welcome to Hamilton Hill, old comrade. My lady will drink to your health too, before she hears the latest Paris news. She has not forgotten her country; and as for me, why, you know our old principle, '*mousquetaire avant tout!*'"

Sir George emptied his glass, and Cerise, bowing courteously, touched hers with her lips. Florian found himself at once, so to speak, *enfant*

de la maison, and recovered his presence of mind accordingly.

He addressed himself, however, chiefly to his host. "You forget," said he, "that I have been living in the seclusion of a cloister. Though I have carried a sword and kept my watches under your command, and spent almost the happiest days of my life in your company, I was a priest before I was a Musketeer, and a priest I must always remain. Nevertheless, even at St. Omer, we are not utterly severed from the world and its vanities; and though we do not participate in them, we hear them freely canvassed. The first news, of course, for madame (pardon! I must learn to call you by your English name—for Lady Hamilton), regards the despotism of King *Chiffon*. The farthingale is worn more oval; diamond buckles are gone out; it is bad taste just now to carry a fan anywhere except to church."

In spite of his agitation he adopted a light tone of jest befitting the subject—for was he not a Jesuit?—and stole a look at Cerise while he spoke. Many a time had he dreamt of a lovely girl blooming into womanhood, in the Convent of our Lady of Succour. Ever since the tumult of her hasty wedding, after the escape from *Cash-à-Crou*, he had been haunted by a pale, sweet, agitated face, on which he

had invoked a blessing at the altar from the depths of his tortured heart; but what did he think of her now? She had reached that queenly standard to which women only attain after marriage; and while she had lost none of her early charms—her frankness, her simplicity, her radiant smile, her deep truthful eyes—she had added to them that gentle dignity, that calm, assured repose of manner, which completes the graces of mature womanhood, and adorns the wedded wife as fitly as her purple robe becomes a queen.

She could look him in the face quietly and steadily enough; but while his very heart thrilled at her voice, his eyes fell, as though dazzled, beneath her beauty.

"You forget, monsieur," said she, with an affectionate glance at her husband, "I am an Englishwoman now; and we have deeper interests here even than the change of fashions and the revolutions in the kingdom of dress. Besides, mamma keeps me informed on all such subjects, as well as those of more importance; but she is in Touraine now, and I am quite in the dark as regards everything at Paris; above all, the political state of the court. You see we are no longer Musketeers."

She smiled playfully at George, in allusion to the

sentiment he had lately broached, and looked, Florian thought, lovelier than ever.

The excitement of conversation had brought a colour to her cheek. Now, when she ceased, it faded away, leaving her perhaps none the less beautiful, that she was a little pale and seemed tired. He observed the change of course. Not an inflection of her voice, not a quiver of an eyelash, not one of those silken hairs out of place on her soft forehead, could have escaped his notice. "Was she unhappy?" he thought; "was she, too, dissatisfied with her lot? Had she failed to reach that resting-place of the heart which is sought for eagerly by so many, and found but by so few?" It pained him; yes, he was glad to feel that it pained him to think this possible. Yet would he have been better pleased to learn that her languor of manner, her pale weariness of brow, were only the effects of her morning's disappointment, when she waited in vain for the company of her husband?

But such an under-current of reflection in no way affected the tide of his conversation; nor had he forgotten the primary cause of his journey, the especial object for which he was now sitting at Sir George Hamilton's table.

"I cannot pretend," said he, "to be so well

informed on political matters as Madame la Marquise. I can only tell you the news of all the world—the gossip that people talk in the streets. The Regent is unpopular, and grows more so day by day. His excesses have at last disgusted the good *bourgeoisie* of the capital; and these honest citizens, who think only of selling spices over a counter, will, as you know, endure a good deal before they venture to complain of a Prince who throws money about with both hands. As the young King grows older, they are more encouraged to cry out; and in Paris, as in Persia, they tell me, it is now the fashion to worship the rising sun. Of course France will follow suit; but we are quiet people at St. Omer; and I do not think our peasantry in Artois have yet realized the death of Louis Quatorze. When *Jean Baptiste* is thoroughly satisfied on that point, he will, of course, throw up his red cap, and shout '*Vive Louis Quinze!*' Till then the Regency assumes all the indistinct terrors of the Unknown. Seriously, I believe the Duke's day is over, and that the way to Court favour lies through Villeroy's orderly-room into the apartment of the young King!"

"And the Musketeers?" asked Sir George, eagerly. "That must be all in their favour. They

have stood so firm by the Marshal and the *real* throne, their privileges will now surely be respected and increased."

"On the contrary," replied Florian, "the Musketeers are in disgrace. The grey company was actually warned to leave Paris for Marly, although neither the King nor the Regent were to be there in person. At the last moment the order was revoked, or there must have been a mutiny. As it was, they refused to parade on the Duke's birthday, and were only brought to reason by Bras-de-Fer, who made them a speech as long as that interminable sword he wears at his belt."

"Which was not long enough to reach my ribs, however," interrupted Sir George, heartily, "with the Cadet Eugéne Beaudésir at my side to parry it. Oh! that such a fencer should be thrown away on the Church! Well, fill your glass, Sir Priest, and never blush about it. Cerise here knows the whole story, and has only failed to thank you because she has not yet had the opportunity."

"But I do now," interposed Lady Hamilton, bending on him her blue eyes with the pure tenderness of an angel. "I thank you for it with my whole heart."

He felt at that moment how less than trifling had

been his service compared with his reward. In his exaltation he would have laid his life down willingly for them both.

"That was a mere chance," said he, making light of his exploit with a forced laugh. "The whole affair was but the roughest cudgel-play from beginning to end. I, at least, have no cause to regret it, speaking in my secular capacity, for it led to an agreeable cruise and a sight of the most beautiful island in the world, where, I hope, I was fortunate enough to be of some service to Sir George in a manner more befitting my calling."

Again he forced himself to smile, addressing his speech to Lady Hamilton, without looking at her.

"And what of the new Court?" asked Cerise, observing his confusion with some astonishment, and kindly endeavouring to cover it. "Will the young King fulfil all the promise of his boyhood? They used to say he would grow up the image of Louis le Grand."

"The new Court," answered Florian, lightly, "like all other new Courts, is the exact reverse of the old. To be in favour with the Regent is to be an eyesore to the King; to have served Louis le Grand faithfully, is to be wearisome, *rococo*, and behind the times; while, if a courtier

wishes to bid for favour with the Duke, he must forswear the rest of the Royal family—go about drunk by daylight, and set at open defiance, not only the sacred moralities of life, but all the common decencies of society."

"'The scum, then,' comes well to the surface," observed Sir George, laughing. "It seems that in the respectable Paris of to-day there is a better chance than ever for a reprobate!"

"There is a way to fortune for honest men," answered the Jesuit, "that may be trodden now with every appearance of safety, and without the loss of self-esteem. It leads, in my opinion, directly to success, and keeps the straight, unswerving path of honour all the time. 'The Bashful Maid,' Sir George, used to lay her course faithfully by the compass, and I have often thought what a good example that inanimate figure-head showed to those who controlled her movements. But I must ask Lady Hamilton's pardon," he added, with mock gravity, "for thus mentioning her most formidable rival in her presence. If you can call to mind, madame, her resolute front, her coal-black hair, her glaring eyes, her complexion of rich vermillion, mantling even to the tip of her nose, and the devotion paid to her charms by captain as well

as crew, you must despair of equalling her in Sir George's eyes, and can never know a moment's peace again."

Slap-Jack, clearing the table with much ceremony, could scarcely refrain from giving audible expression to his delight.

Lady Hamilton laughed.

"As you have chosen such a subject of conversation," said she, "it is time for me to retire. After you have done justice to the charms of 'The Bashful Maid,' whom, when she was not too lively, I admired as much as any one, and have exhausted your Musketeer's reminiscences, you will find *me*, and, what is more to the purpose, a dish of hot coffee, in the little room at the end of the gallery. Till then, *Sans adieu !*" and her ladyship walked out, laying her hand on Sir George's shoulder to prevent his rising while she passed, with an affectionate gesture that was in itself a caress.

The Jesuit gazed after her as she disappeared, and, resuming his place at the table, felt that whatever difficulties he had already experienced, the worst part of his task was now to come.

CHAPTER IV.

"BOX IT ABOUT."

WHEN the door had closed on his wife, Sir George settled himself comfortably in his chair, filled a bumper from the claret jug, and, passing it to Florian, proposed the accustomed toast, drank at many hundred tables in merry England about the same hour.

"Church and King!" said the baronet, and quaffed off a goodly draught, as if he relished the liquor no less than the pledge.

It gave the Jesuit an opening, and, like a skilful fencer, he availed himself of it at once.

"The *true* Church," said he, wetting his lips with wine, "and the *true* King."

Sir George laughed, and looked round the hall.

"Ashore," he observed, "I respect every man's

opinions, though nobody has a right to think differently from the skipper afloat; but let me tell you, my friend, such sentiments as your qualification implies had better be kept to yourself. They might shorten your visit at Hamilton, and even cause your journey to end at Traitors' Gate in the Tower of London."

He spoke in his usual reckless, good-humoured tone. Despite the warning, Florian perceived that the subject was neither dreaded nor discouraged by his host. He proceeded, therefore, to feel his ground cautiously, but with confidence.

"Your English Government," said he, "is doubtless on the watch, and with good reason. In the Trades, I remember, we used to say that 'The Bashful Maid' might be left to steer herself, but when we got among the squalls of the Caribbean Sea, we kept a pretty sharp look-out, as you know, to shorten sail at a moment's warning. Your ship up there in London is not making very good weather of it even now, and the breeze is only springing up to-day that will freshen to a gale to-morrow. At least, so we think over the water. Perhaps we are misinformed."

Sir George raised his eyebrows, and pondered. He had guessed as much for some time. Though

with so many new interests, he had busied himself of late but little with politics, yet it was not in his nature to be entirely unobservant of public affairs. He had seen plenty of clouds on the horizon, and knew they portended storms; but the old habits of military caution had not deserted him, and he answered, carelessly:

"That depends on what you think you know. These Jesuits—pardon me, comrade, I cannot help addressing you as a Musketeer—these Jesuits, sometimes know a great deal more than their prayers, but rather than prove mistaken, they will themselves create the complications they claim to have discovered. Frankly, you may speak out here. Our oak panels have no ears, and my servants are most of them deaf, and all faithful. What is the last infallible scheme at St. Omer? How many priests are stirring hard at the broth? How many marshals of France are longing to scald their mouths? Who is blowing the fire up, to keep it all hot and ensure the caldron's bubbling over at the right moment?"

Florian laughed. "Greater names than you think for," he replied. "Fewer priests, more marshals. Peers of France to light the fire, and a prince of the blood to take the cover off. Oh! trust me

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this is no *soupe maigre*. The stock is rich, the liquid savoury, and many a tempting morsel lies floating here and there for those who are not afraid of a dash with the flesh-hook, and will take their chance of burnt fingers in the process."

"That is all very well for people who are hungry," answered Sir George; "but when a man has dined, you can no longer tempt with a *ragoût*. The desire of a full man is to sit still and digest his food."

"Ambition has never dined," argued the other; "ambition is always hungry, and has the digestion of an ostrich. Like that insatiable bird, it can swallow an earl's patent, parchment, ribbon, seals, and all, thankfully and at a gulp!"

The baronet considered, took a draught of claret, and spoke out.

"Earls' patents don't go begging about in a Jesuit's pocket without reason. Nor are they given to the first comer who asks, only because he can swallow them. Tell me honestly what you mean, Eugéne—Florian. How am I to call you? With *me*, you are as safe as in the confessional at St. Omer. But speak no more in parables. Riddles are my aversion. A hidden meaning is as irritating as an ugly woman in a

mask, and I never in my life could fence for ten minutes with an equal adversary, but I longed to take the buttons off the foils!"

Thus adjured, Florian proceeded to unfold the object of his mission.

"You were surprised, perhaps," said he, "to learn from Slap-Jack, who no doubt thought me a ghost till I spoke first, that your old comrade would be sitting with his legs at the same table as yourself this afternoon. You were gratified, I am sure, but you must have been puzzled. Now, Sir George, if you believe that my only reason for crossing the Channel, and riding post a couple of hundred miles, was that I might empty a stoup of this excellent claret in your company, you are mistaken." He stopped, blushed violently, somewhat to his host's astonishment, and hid his confusion by replenishing his glass.

"I had another object of far more importance both to yourself and to your country. Besides this, I am but fulfilling the orders of my superiors. They employed me—Heaven knows why they employed me!" he broke out vehemently, "except that they thought you the dearest friend I had on earth. And so you *are!* and so you *shall* be! Listen, Sir George. The last person I spoke with

before leaving France had dined with Villeroy, previous to setting out for St. Omer. The young King had just seen the Marshal, the latter was charged with his Majesty's congratulations to the King of England (the real King of England) on his infant's recovery. The boy who had been ailing, is still in arms, and his Majesty asked if the young Prince Charles could speak yet? 'When he does,' said Villeroy, who has been a courtier for forty years, 'the first sentence he ought to say is, "God bless the King of France."' 'Not so,' answered his Majesty, laughing, 'let him learn the Jacobite countersign, "Box it about, it will come to my father!" If they only "box it about" enough,' he added, 'that child in arms should be as sure of the British crown as I am of the French!' This is almost a declaration in form. It is considered so in Paris. The King's sentiments can no longer be called doubtful, and with the strong party that I have every reason to believe exists in England, disaffected to your present government, surely the time for action has arrived. They thought so at St. Omer, in a conclave to which I am a mere mouth-piece. I should think so myself, might a humble novice presume to offer an opinion; and when the move-

ment takes place, if Sir George Hamilton is found where his blood, his antecedents, his high spirit and adventurous character are likely to lead him, I have authority to declare that he will be Sir George Hamilton no longer. The earl's patent is already made out, which any moment he pleases may be swallowed at a gulp, for digestion at his leisure. I have said my say; I have made a clean breast of it; send for Slap-Jack and your venerable butler; put me in irons; hand me over to your municipal authorities, if you have any, and let them drag me to prison: but give me another glass of that excellent claret first, for my throat is dry with so much talking!"

Sir George laughed and complied.

"You are a plausible advocate, Florian," he observed after a moment's thought, "and your powers of argument are little inferior to your skill in fence. But this is a lee-shore, my good friend, to which you are driving, a lee-shore with bad anchorage, shoal-water, and thick weather all round. I like to keep the lead going on such a course, and only to carry sail enough for steerage-way. As far as I am concerned, I should wish to see them 'box it about' a little longer, before I made up my mind how the game would go!"

"That is not like *you!*" exclaimed the Jesuit, hotly. "The Hamiltons have never yet waited to draw, till they knew which was the winning side."

"No man shall say that of me," answered the other, in a stern, almost an angry tone, and for a space, the two old comrades sat sipping their wine in silence.

Sir George had spoken the truth when he said that a full man is willing to sit still—at least as far as his own inclinations were concerned. He had nothing to gain by a change, and everything to lose, should that change leave him on the beaten side. Moreover, he relished the advantages of his present position far more than had he been born with the silver spoon in his mouth. Then, perhaps, he would have depreciated the luxury of plate and believed that the pewter he had not tried might be equally agreeable. People who have never been really hungry hardly understand the merits of a good dinner. You must sleep on the bare ground for a week or two, before you know the value of sheets and blankets and a warm soft bed. Sir George had got into safe anchorage now, and it required a strong temptation to lure him out to sea again. True, the man's habits were those of an adventurer.

He had led a life of action from the day he first accompanied his father across the Channel in an open boat, at six years old, till he found himself a prosperous, wealthy, disengaged country gentleman at Hamilton Hill. He might grow tired of that respectable position—it was very likely he would—but not yet. The novelty was still pleasant; the ease, the leisure, the security, the freedom from anxiety, were delightful to a man who had never before been "off duty," so to speak, in his life. Then he enjoyed above all things the field sports of the wild country in which he lived. His hawks were the best within a hundred miles. His hounds, hardy, rough, steady and untiring, would follow a lean travelling fox from dawn to dark of the short November day, and make as good an account of him at last as of a fat wide-antlered stag under the blazing sun of August. He had some interest, some excitement, for every season as it passed. If all his broad acres were not fertile in corn, he owned wide meres covered with wild-fowl, streams in which trout and grayling leaped in the soft May mornings, like raindrops in a shower, where the otter lurked and vanished, where the noble salmon himself came arrowing up triumphant from the sea. Woods, too, in which the stately red deer

found a shelter, and swelling hills of purple heather, where the moor-cock pruned his wing, and the curlew's plaintive wail died off in the surrounding wilderness.

All this afforded pleasant pastime, none the less pleasant that his limbs were strong, his health robust, and the happy, hungry sportsman could return at sundown to a comfortable house, an excellent table, and a cellar good enough for the Pope. Such material comforts are not to be despised—least of all by men who have known the want of them. Ask any old campaigner whether he does not appreciate warmth, food, and shelter, even idleness, so long as the effects of previous fatigue remain. These things may pall after a time, but until they *do* so pall, they are delightful, and not to be relinquished but for weighty motives, nor even then without regret.

Sir George, too, in taking a wife, had "given pledges to fortune," as Lord Bacon hath it. He loved Cerise very dearly, and although an elevating affection for a worldly object will never make a man a coward, it tones down all the wild recklessness of his nature, and bids the boldest hesitate ere he risks his earthly treasure even at the call of ambition. It is the sore heart that seeks an ano-

dyne in the excitement of danger and the confusion of tumultuous change.

Moreover, men's habits of thought are acted on far more easily than they will admit, by the opinions of those amongst whom they live.

Sir George's friends and neighbours, the honest country gentlemen, with whom he cheered his hounds or killed his game abroad, and drank his claret at home, were enthusiastic Jacobites in theory, but loyal and quiet subjects of King George in practice. They inherited, indeed, much of the high feeling, and many of the chivalrous predilections that had instigated their grandfathers and great-grandfathers to strike desperately for King Charles at Marston Moor and Naseby Field, but they inherited also the sound sense that was often found lurking under the cavalier's love-locks, the dogged patriotism, and strong affection for their church, which filled those hearts that beat so stoutly behind laced shirts and buff coats when opposed to Cromwell and his Ironsides.

With the earlier loyalists to uphold the Stuart was to fight for principle, property, personal freedom, and liberty of conscience, but to support his grandson now was a different matter altogether. His cause had but one argument in its favour, and

that was the magic of a name. To take up arms on his behalf was to lose lands, position, possibly life, if defeated, of which catastrophe there seemed every reasonable prospect; while, in the event of victory, there was too much ground to suppose that the reward of these efforts would be to see the Church of England, the very institution for which they had been taught by their fathers to shed their blood, oppressed, persecuted, and driven from her altars, by the Church of Rome.

As in a long and variable struggle between two wrestlers, each of the great contending parties might now be said to stand upon the adversary's ground, their tactics completely altered, their positions exactly reversed.

It was only in the free intercourse of conviviality, with feelings roused by song, or brains heated by claret, that the bulk of these Northern country gentlemen ever thought of alluding to the absent family in terms of affection and regret. They were for the most part easy in their circumstances and happy in their daily course of life; their heads were safe, their property protected, their rents rising, and they were satisfied to leave well alone.

George had that day met some dozen of his new companions, neighbouring gentlemen with whom he

was now on friendly and familiar terms, at a cock-fight; this little assemblage represented fairly enough the tone of feeling that prevailed through the whole district; these jovial squires might be taken as fair representatives of their order in half a dozen counties north of the Trent. As he passed them mentally in review, one by one, he could not think of a single individual likely to listen favourably to such proposals as Florian seemed empowered to make, at least at an earlier hour than three in the afternoon.

When dinner was pretty well advanced, many men, in those days, were wont to display an enthusiastic readiness for any wild scheme broached, irrespective of their inability to comprehend its bearings, and their impatience of its details, but when morning brought headache and reflection, such over-hasty partizans were, of all others, the least disposed to encounter the risk, the expense, and especially the trouble, entailed by another Jacobite rising in favour of the Stuarts. Sir George could think of none who, in sober earnest, would subscribe a shilling to the cause, or bring a single mounted soldier into the field.

There was also one more reason touching his self-interest very closely, which rendered Sir George

Hamilton essentially an upholder of the existing state of things. He had broad acres, indeed, but the men with broad acres have never in the history of our country been averse to meddling with public affairs—they have those acres to look to in every event. If worst comes to worst, sequestration only lasts while the enemy remains in power, and landed property, though it may elude its owner for a while, does not vanish entirely off the face of the earth. But Sir George had made considerable gains during his seafaring career with the assistance of "The Bashful Maid," and these he had invested in a flourishing concern, which, under the respectable title of the Bank of England, has gone on increasing in prosperity to the present day. The Bank of England had lent large sums of money to the Government, and as a revolution would have forced it to stop payment, Sir George, even if he had chosen to accept his earl's patent, must have literally bought it with all the hard cash he possessed in the world.

Such a consideration alone would have weighed but little, for he was neither a timid man nor a covetous; but when with his habitual quickness of thought he reviewed the whole position, scanning all its difficulties at a glance, he made up his mind

that unless his old lieutenant had some more dazzling bait to offer than an earl's coronet, he would not entertain his proposals seriously for a moment.

"And what have *you* to gain?" he asked, good-humouredly, after the short silence, during which each had been busy with his own meditations. "What do they offer the zealous Jesuit priest in consideration of his services, supposing those services are successful? What will they give you? the command of the Body Guard in London, or the fleet at Sheerness? Will they make you a councillor, a colonel, or a commodore? Lord Mayor of London, or Archbishop of Canterbury? On my honour, Florian, I believe you are capable of filling any one of these posts with infinite credit. Something has been promised you, surely, were it only a pair of scarlet hose and a cardinal's hat."

"*Nothing!* as I am a gentleman and a priest!" answered Florian, eagerly. "My advocacy is but for your own sake! For the aggrandizement of yourself and those who love you! For the interests of loyalty and the true religion!"

"You were always an enthusiast," answered the baronet, kindly, "and enthusiasts in every cause are juggled out of their reward. Take

a leaf from the book of your employers, and remember their own watchword: 'Box it about, it will come to my father.' Do you let them 'box it about,' till it has nearly reached the—the—well, the claimant of the British crown, and when he has opened his hands to seize the prize, *you* give it the last push that sends it into his grasp—the Pope could not offer you better counsel. If you have drunk enough claret, let us go to our coffee in Lady Hamilton's *boudoir*."

But Florian excused himself on the plea of fatigue and business. He had letters to write, he said, which was perfectly true, though they might well have been postponed for a day, or even a week—but he wanted an hour's solitude to survey his position, to look steadily on the future, and determine how far he should persevere in the course on which he had embarked. Neither had he courage to face Cerise again so soon. He felt anxious, agitated, unnerved, by her very presence, and the sound of her voice. To-morrow he would feel more like himself. To-morrow he could learn to look upon her as she must always be to him in future, the wife of his friend. Of course, he argued, this task would become easier day by day; and so, to begin it, he leaned out of window, watching the

stars come one by one into the sky, breathing the perfume from the late autumn flowers in her garden, and thinking that, while to him she was more beautiful than the star, more lovable than the flower, he might as well hope to reach the one as to pluck *her* like the other, and wear her for himself.

Still, he resolved that his affection—mad, hopeless as it was—should never exceed the limits he had marked out. He would watch over her steps and secure her happiness, he would make her husband great and noble for her sake, everything belonging to her should be for him a sacred and inviolable trust. He would admire her as an angel, and adore her as a saint! It was good, he thought, for both of them, that he was a priest!

Enthusiasm in all but the cause of Heaven is, indeed, usually juggled out of its reward, and Sir George had read Florian's character aright when he called him an enthusiast.

CHAPTER V.

THE LITTLE RIFT.

From Lady Hamilton to Madame la Marquise de Montmirail.

"MY VERY DEAR MAMMA,—

"You shall not again have cause to complain of my negligence in writing, nor to accuse me of forgetting my own dear mother, amongst all the new employments and dissipations of my English home.

"You figure to yourself that both are extremely engrossing, and so numerous that I have not many moments to spare, even for the most sacred of duties. Of employments, yes, these are indeed plentiful, and recur day by day. Would you like to know what they are? At seven every morning my coffee

is brought by an English maid, who stares at me open-mouthed while I drink it, and wonders I do not prefer to breakfast like herself, directly I am up, on salt beef and small beer. She has not yet learned any of my dresses by name; and when she fastens my hair, her hands tremble so, that it all comes tumbling about my shoulders long before I can get down-stairs. She is stupid, awkward, slow, but gentle, willing, and rather pretty. Somehow I cannot help loving her, though I wish with all my heart she was a better maid.

"If George has not already gone out on some sporting expedition—and he is passionately fond of such pursuits, perhaps because they relieve the monotony of married life, which, I fear, is inexpressibly tedious to men like him, who have been accustomed to constant excitement—I find him in the great hall eating as if he were famished, and in a prodigious hurry to be off. I fill him his cup of claret with my own hands, for my darling says he can only drink wine in the morning when I pour it out for him myself; and before I have time to ask a single question he is in the saddle and gallops off. Mamma, I never *have* time to ask him any questions. I suppose men are always so busy. I sometimes think I too should like to have been a man.

Perhaps, then, this large, dark, over-furnished house would not look so gloomy when he is gone.

"Perhaps, too, the housekeeper would not tell me such long stories about what they did in the old time when Barbara, Lady Hamilton, reigned here. By all accounts she must have been an ogress, with a mania for accumulating linen. You will laugh at me, dear mamma—you who never feared the face of any human being—but I am a little afraid of this good Dame Diaper, and so glad when our interview is over. I wish I had more courage. George must think me such a coward, he who is so brave. I heard him say the other day that the finest sight he ever saw in his life was the *beautiful Marquise* (meaning you, mamma) at bay. I asked him if he did not see poor frightened me at a sad disadvantage? and he answered by—No, I won't tell you how he answered. Ah! dear mother, I always wished to be like you from the time I was a little girl. Every day now I wish it more and more. After my release from Dame Diaper I go to the garden and look at my Provençe roses—there are seven buds to flower yet; and the autumn here, though finer than I expected, is much colder than in France. Then I walk out and visit my poor. I wish I could understand their *patois* better, but I am improving day by day.

"The hours do not pass by very quick till three o'clock; but at three we dine, and George is sure to be back, often bringing a friend with him who stays all night, for in this country the gentlemen do not like travelling after dinner, and perhaps they are right. When we have guests I see but little of George again till supper-time, and then I am rather tired, and he is forced to attend to his company, so that I have no opportunity of conversing with him. Would you believe it, mamma, for three days I have wanted to speak to him about an alteration in my garden, and we have never yet had a spare five minutes to go and look at it together?

"Our employments in England, you see, are regular, and perhaps a little monotonous, but they are gaiety itself, compared with our amusements. I like these English, or rather, I should say, I respect them (mind, mamma, I do not call my husband a regular Englishman), but I think when they amuse themselves they appear to the greatest disadvantage.

"We were invited, George and I, the other day, to dine with our neighbour, Sir Marmaduke Umpleby. Heavens! what a strange name! We started at noon, because he lives three leagues off, and the roads are infamous; they are not paved

like ours, but seem mere tracks through the fields and across the moor. It rained the whole journey; and though we had six horses, we stuck twice and were forced to get out and walk. George carried me in his arms that I might not wet my feet, and swore horribly, but with good humour, and only as he says, *en mousquetaire!* I was not a bit frightened—I never am with *him*. At last there we are arrived, a party of twenty to meet us, and dinner already erved. I am presented to every lady in turn—there are nine of them—and they all shake hands with me; but, after that, content themselves with hoping I am not wet, and then they stare—how they stare! as if I were some wild animal caught in a trap. I do not know where to look. You cannot think, mamma what a difference there is between a society in England and with us. The gentlemen are then presented to me, and I like these far better than the ladies; they are rather awkward, perhaps, and unpolished in manner, but they seem gentlemen at heart, terribly afraid of a woman, one and all, yet respecting her, obviously because she *is* a woman, and though they blush, and stammer, and tread on your dress, something seems to tell you that they are really ready to sacrifice for you their own vanity and convenience.

"This is to me more flattering than the external politeness of our French gallants, who bow indeed with an air of inimitable courtesy, and use the most refined phrases, while all the time they are saying things that make you feel quite hot. Now, George never puts one in a false position—I mean, he never used. He has an Englishman's heart, and the manners of a French prince; but then, you know there is nobody like my own Musketeer.

"At last we go to dinner. Such a dinner! Enormous joints of sheep and oxen steaming under one's very nose! In England, to amuse oneself, it is not only necessary to have prodigious quantities to eat, but one must also sit among the smoke and savour of the dishes till they are consumed.

"It took away my appetite completely, and I think my fan has smelt of beef ever since. I sat next Sir Marmaduke, and he good-naturedly endeavoured to make conversation for me by talking of Paris and the Regent's Court. His ideas of our manners and customs were odd, to say the least, and he seemed quite surprised to learn that unmarried ladies never went into general society alone, and even married ones usually with their husbands. I hope he has a better opinion of us now. I am quite sure the poor old gentleman thought the

proprieties were sadly disregarded in Paris till I enlightened him.

"The English ladies are scrupulously correct in their demeanour; they are, I do believe, the most excellent of wives and mothers; but oh! mamma, to be virtuous, is it necessary to be so ill-dressed? When we left the gentlemen to their wine, which is always done here, and which, I think, must be very beneficial to the wine-trade, we adjourned to a large cold room, where we sat in a circle, and had nothing to do but look at each other. I thought I had never seen so many bright colours so tastelessly put together. My hostess herself, a fresh well-preserved woman of a certain age, wore a handsome set of amethysts with a purple dress—Amethysts and purple! great Heaven! It would have driven Célandine mad!

"It was dull—figure to yourself how dull—nine women waiting for their nine husbands, and not a subject in common except the probability of continued rain! Still we talked—it must be admitted we contrived to talk—and after a while the gentlemen appeared, and supper came; so the day was over at last, and next morning we were to go home. Believe me, I was not sorry.

"Yesterday we had a visitor, and imagine if he

was welcome, since he brought me news of my dear mamma. He had seen Madame la Marquise passing the Palais-Royal in her coach before she left Paris for Touraine. 'How was she looking?' 'As she always does, avowedly the most beautiful lady in France.' 'Like a damask rose,' says George, with a laugh at poor pale me. Our visitor did not speak to madame, for he has not the honour of her acquaintance; 'but it is enough to see her once in a season,' said he, 'and do homage from a distance.'

"Was not all this very polite, and very prettily expressed? Now can you guess who this admirer of yours may be? I will give you ten chances; I will give you a hundred. Monsieur de St. Croix! the priest who was my director at the convent, and who appeared so opportunely at the little white chapel above Port Welcome. Is it not strange that he should be here now? I have put him into the oak-room on the *entresol*, because it is warm and quiet, and he looks so pale and ill. He is the mere shadow of what he used to be, and I should hardly have known him but for his dark expressive eyes. So different from George, who is the picture of health, and handsomer I think than ever. He (I mean Monsieur de St. Croix) is very agreeable and full of French news. He is also an excellent gar-

dener, and helps me out-of-doors almost every day, now that George is so much occupied. He says that the priests of his Order learn to do everything; and I believe if I asked him to dress an *omelette*, he would manage to accomplish it. At least, I am sure he would try. To-day he is gone to see some of his colleagues who have an establishment far up in the dales, as we call them here, and George is out with his hawks, so I am rather dull; but do not think that is the reason I have sat down to write you this foolish letter. Next to hearing from you, it is my greatest pleasure to tell you all about myself, and fancy that I am speaking to you even at this great distance. Think of me, dear mamma, very often, for scarcely an hour passes that I do not think of you."

The letter concluded with an elaborate account of a certain white dress, the result of a successful combination, in which lace, muslin, and cherry-coloured ribbons formed the principal ingredients, which George had admired very much—not, however, until his attention was called to it by the wearer—and which was put on for the first time the day of Monsieur de St. Croix's arrival.

Madame de Montmirail received this missive in little more than a week after it was written, and replied at once.

Madame de Montmirail to Lady Hamilton.

"It rejoiced me so much to hear from you, my dear child. I was getting anxious about your health, your spirits, a thousand things that I think of continually; for my darling Cerise is never out of my mind. What you say of your society amuses me, and I can well imagine my shy girl feeling lost amongst an assemblage of awkward gentlemen and stupid ladies, far more than in a Court ball at the Palais-Royal, or a reception at Marly as it used to be; alas! as it will be no more. When you are as old as I am—for I am getting very old now, as you would say if you could see me closeted every morning over my accounts with my intendant—when you are as old as I am, you will have learned that there is very little difference between one society and another, so long as people are of a certain class, of course, and do not eat with their knives. Manner is but a trick, easily acquired if we begin young, but impossible to learn after thirty. Real politeness, which is a different thing altogether, is but good nature in its best clothes, and consists chiefly in the faculty of putting oneself in another person's place, and the wish to do as one would be done by. I have often seen people with very bad

manners exceedingly polite. I have also, even oftener, seen the reverse. If you do not suffer yourself to find these English tedious, you will extract from them plenty of amusement; and the talent of being easily entertained is one to be cultivated to the utmost.

"Even in Paris, they tell me to-day, such a talent would be most enviable; for all complain of the dulness pervading society, and the oppressive influence of the Court. I cannot speak from my own observation, for I have been careful to go nowhere while in the capital, and to retire to my estates here in Touraine as quickly as possible. I have not even seen the Prince-Marshal, nor do I feel that my spirits would be good enough to endure his importunate kindness. I hear, moreover, that he devotes himself now to Mademoiselle de Villeroy, the old Marshal's youngest daughter; so you will accuse me of *pique* rather than ingratitude.

"I am not unhappy here, for I think I like a country life. My intendant is excessively stupid, and supplies me with constant occupation. I pass my mornings in business, and see my housekeeper too, but am not the least afraid of her, and I write an infinity of letters, some of them to Montmirail-West. Célandine is still there with her husband,

and they have got the estate once more under cultivation. Had I left it immediately after the revolt, I am persuaded every acre of it would have passed out of our possession. We had a narrow escape, my darling, though I think I could have held out five minutes longer; but I shall never forget the flash of Sir George's sword as he leaped in, nor, I think, will *you*. He is a brave man, my child, and a resolute. Such are the easiest for a woman to manage; but still the art of guiding a husband is not unlike that of ruling a horse. You must adapt yourself instinctively to his movements; but, although you should never seem mistrustful, you must not altogether abandon the rein. Whilst you feel it gently, he has all imaginable liberty; but you know *exactly where he is*. Above all, never wound yours in his self-love. He would not show he was hurt, but the injury with him would, therefore, be incurable. I do not think he would condescend to expostulate, or to give you a chance of explanation; but day by day you would find yourselves farther and farther apart. You would be miserable, and perhaps so would he.

"You will wonder that I should have studied his character so carefully; but is not your happiness now my first, my only, object in the world?"

"Monsieur de St. Croix seems to be an agreeable addition to your family *tête-à-tête*. Not that such an addition can be already required; but I suppose, as an old comrade and friend, your husband cannot but entertain him so long as he chooses to remain. Was not he the man with the romantic story, who had been priest, fencing-master, pirate—what shall I say?—and priest again? I cannot imagine such avocations imparting a deeper knowledge of flowers than is possessed by your own gardener at home; and if I were in your place, I should on no account permit him to interfere with the *omelette* in any way. Neither in a flower-garden nor a kitchen is a priest in his proper place. I think yours would be better employed in the saddle *en route* for St. Omer, or wherever his college is established.

"Talking of the last-named place reminds me of Malletort. The Abbé, strange to say, has thrown himself into the arms of the Jesuits. Though I have seen him repeatedly, I cannot learn his intentions, nor the nature of his schemes, for scheme he will, I know, so long as his brain can think. He talks of absence from France, and hints at a mission from the Order to some savage climes; but if he anticipates martyrdom, which I cannot easily believe, his spirits are wonderfully little depressed

by the prospect, and he seems, if possible, more sarcastic than ever. He even rode with me after dinner the last time he was here, and asked me a thousand questions about you. I ride by myself now, and I like it better. I can wander about these endless woods, and think—think. What else is left when the time to act is gone by?

"You tell me little about Sir George; his health, his looks, his employments. Does he mingle with the society of the country? Does he interest himself in politics? Whatever his pursuits, I am sure he will take a leading part. Give him my kindest regards. You will both come and see me here some day before very long. Write again soon to your loving mother. They brought me a half-grown fawn last week from the top of the Col St. Jacques, where you dropped your glove into the waterfall. We are trying to tame it in the garden, and I call it Cerise."

No letter could be more affectionate, more motherly. Why did Lady Hamilton shed the first tears of her married life during its perusal? She wept bitterly, confessed she was foolish, nervous, hysterical; read it over once more, and wept again. Then she bathed her eyes, as she used at the convent, but without so satisfactory a result, smoothed

her hair, composed her features, and went down stairs.

Florian had been absent all the morning. He had again ridden abroad to meet a conclave of his Order, held at an old abbey far off amongst the dales, and was expected back to dinner. It now occurred to her, for the first time, that the hours passed less quickly in his absence. She was provoked at the thought, and attributed her ill-humour, somewhat unfairly, to her mother's letter. The tears nearly sprang to her eyes again, but she sent them back with an effort, and descended the wide old staircase in an uncomfortable, almost an irritable, frame of mind, for which she could give no reason even to herself.

Strange to say, George was waiting for her in the hall. He had returned wet from hunting, and was now dressed and ready for dinner a few minutes before the usual time. Florian had not yet made his appearance.

"What has become of our priest?" called out the baronet, good-humouredly, as his wife descended the stairs. "I thought, Cerise, he was tied to your apron-strings, and would never be absent at this hour of the day. I wish he may not have met with some disaster," he added more gravely; "there are

plenty of hawks even in this out-of-the-way place, to whom Florian's capture, dead or alive, would be worth a purse of gold!"

It was impossible to help it, coming thus immediately on her mother's letter, and although she was fiercely angry with herself for the weakness, Cerise blushed down to the very tips of her fingers. George could not but remark her confusion, and observed at the same time that her eyelids were red from recent tears. He looked surprised, but his voice was kindly and re-assuring as usual.

"Good heavens, my darling! What has happened?" he asked, putting his arm round her waist. "You have had bad news, or you are ill, or something is amiss!"

She was as pale now as she had been crimson a moment before. How could she explain to *him* the cause of her confusion? How could she hope to make a *man* understand her feelings? Her first impulse was to produce her mother's letter, but the remarks in it about their guest prevented her following so wise a course, and yet if she ignored it altogether would not this be the first secret from her husband? No wonder she turned pale. It seemed as if her mother's warning were required already.

In such a dilemma she floundered, of course, deeper and deeper. By way of changing the subject, she caught at her husband's suggestion, and exclaimed with her pale face and tearful eyes:

"Capture! Monsieur de St. Croix captured! Heavens, George, we cannot go to dinner unconcerned if our guest is in real danger. You can save him, you *must* save him. What shall we do?"

He had withdrawn his arm from her waist. He looked her scrutinizingly in the face, and then turned away to the window.

"Make yourself easy, Cerise," he answered coldly. "I see him riding up the avenue. Your suspense will be over in less than five minutes now."

Then he began to play with the hawk on its perch, teasing the bird, and laughing rather boisterously at its ruffled plumage and impotent anger.

She felt she had offended, though she scarcely knew how, and after a moment's consideration determined to steal behind him, put her arms round his neck and tell him so. The very conflict showed she loved him, the victory over her own heart's pride proved how dearly, but unfortunately at this moment Florian entered full of apologies for being late, followed by Slap-Jack and a line of servants bringing dinner.

Unfortunately, also, and according to the usual fatality in such cases, Monsieur de St. Croix addressed most of his conversation to Lady Hamilton during the meal, and she could not but betray by her manner an embarrassment she had no cause to feel. Sir George may possibly have observed this, some womanly intuition told Cerise that he did, but his bearing was frank and good-humoured to both, though he filled his glass perhaps oftener than usual, and laughed a little louder than people do who are quite at ease. The wife's quick ear, no doubt, detected so much, and it made her wretched. She loved him very dearly, and it seemed so hard that without any fault of her own she should thus mark "the little rift within the lute," threatening her with undeserved discord; "the little pitted speck in garnered fruit," eating into all the bloom and promise of her life.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MUSIC MUTE.

WHEN Cerise found herself alone, she naturally read her mother's letter once again, and made a variety of resolutions for her future conduct which she could not but acknowledge were derogatory to her own dignity the while. It was her duty, she told herself, to yield to her husband's prejudices, however unreasonable; to give way to him in this, as in every other difference of married life—for she felt it *was* a difference, though expressed only by a turn of his eyebrow, a contraction of his lip—and to trample her own pride under foot when he required it, however humiliating and disagreeable it might be to herself. If George was so absurd as to think she showed an over-anxiety for the safety of their guest, why, she

must bear with his folly because he was her husband, and school her manner to please him, as she schooled her thoughts. After all, was she not interested in Florian only as *his* friend? What was it, what *could* it be, to her, if the priest were carried off to York gaol, or the Tower of London, to-morrow? Lady Hamilton passed very rapidly over this extreme speculation, and perhaps she was right; though it is easy to convince yourself by argument that you are uninterested in any one, the actual process of your thoughts is apt to create something very like a special interest which increases in proportion to the multitude of reasons adduced against its possibility, and that which was but a phantom when you sat down to consider it, has grown into a solid and tangible substance when you get up. Lady Hamilton, therefore, was discreet in reverting chiefly to what her husband thought of *her*, not to what *she* thought of Monsieur de St. Croix.

"He is jealous!" she said to herself, clasping her hands with an emotion that was not wholly without pleasure. "Jealous, poor fellow, and that shows he loves me. Ah! he little knows! he little knows!"

By the time the two gentlemen had finished their wine, and come to her small withdrawing-room, according to custom, for coffee, Cerise had worked

herself up into a high state of self-sacrifice and wife-like devotion. It created rather a reaction to find that Sir George's manner was as cordial and open as ever. He was free with his guest, and familiar with herself, laughing and jesting as if the cloud that had overshadowed his spirits before dinner was now completely passed away and forgotten. She was a little disappointed—a little provoked. After all, then, what mountains had she been making of mole-hills! What a deep grief and abject penitence that had been to *her*, which was but a chance moment of ill-humour, an unconsidered thoughtless whim of her husband; and what a fool had she been so to distress herself, and to resolve that she would even relax the rules of good-breeding—fail in the common duties of hospitality, for such a trifle!

She conversed with Florian, therefore, as usual, which was a little. She listened to him also as usual, which was a good deal. Sir George forced the thought from his mind again and again, yet he could not get rid of it. "How bright Cerise looks when he is talking to her! I never saw her so amused and interested in any one before!"

Now, Monsieur de St. Croix's life at Hamilton Hill ought to have been sufficiently agreeable, if it be true that the real way to make time pass

pleasantly is to alternate the labour of the head and the hands; to be daily engaged in some work of importance, varied by periods of relaxation and moderate excitement. Florian's correspondence usually occupied him for several hours in the morning; and it was remarked that the voluminous packets he received and transmitted were carried by special couriers who arrived and departed at stated times. Some of the correspondence was in cipher, most of it in French, with an English translation, and it seemed to refer principally to the geological formations of the neighbourhood, though a line or two of political gossip interspersed would relieve the dryness of that profound subject. Perhaps many of these packets, ciphers, scientific information, and all, were intended to be read by the authorities at St. James's. Perhaps every courier was entrusted with a set of dispatches on purpose to be seized, and a line in the handle of his whip, a word or two spoken in apparent jest, a mere sign that might be forwarded to a confederate looker-on, signifying the real gist of his intelligence.

At any rate the papers required a deal of preparation, and Florian was seldom able to accompany his host on the sporting expeditions in which the latter took such delight.

Sir George, then, would be off soon after daylight, to return at dinner-time, and in a whole fortnight had not yet found that spare five minutes for a visit to Lady Hamilton's garden, while Florian would be at leisure by noon, and naturally devoted himself to the service of his hostess for the rest of the day.

They read together—they walked together—they gardened together. Some of those special packets that arrived from France, even contained certain seeds which Cerise had expressed a wish to possess, and they talked of their future crop, and the result of their joint labours next year, as if Florian had become an established member of the family, and was never to depart.

This mode of life might have been interrupted by her ladyship's misgivings at first, but she reflected that it would be absurd for her to discontinue an agreeable companionship of which her husband obviously approved, only because she had misapplied her mother's letter, or her mother had misunderstood hers; also it is difficult to resume coldness and reserve, where we have given, and wish to give, confidence and friendship, so Florian and Cerise were to be seen every fine day on the terrace at Hamilton Hill hard at work, side by

side, like brother and sister, over the same flower-bed.

"Florian!" she would say, for Cerise had so accustomed herself to his Christian name in talking of him with her husband, that she did not always call him Monsieur de St. Croix to his face. "Florian! come and help me to tie up this rose-tree—there, hold the knot while I fasten it—now run and fetch me the scissors, they are lying by my flowers on the step. Quick—or it will slip out of my hands! So *there* is my Provençe rose at last—truly a rose without a thorn!"

And Florian did her bidding like a dog, watched her eye, followed her about, and seemed to take a dog's pleasure in the mere fact of being near her. His reward, too, was much the same as that faithful animal's, a kind word, a bright look, a wave of the white hand, denoting a mark of approval rather than a caress. Sometimes, for a minute or two, he could almost fancy he was happy.

And Sir George—did Sir George approve of this constant intercourse, this daily companionship? Were his hawks and his hounds, his meetings with his neighbours for the administration of justice and the training of militia, for the excitement of a cock-fight or the relaxation of a bowling-match, so

engrossing that he never thought of his fair young wife, left for hours in that lonely mansion on the hill to her own thoughts and the society of a Jesuit priest? It was hard to say—Sir George Hamilton's disposition was shrewd though noble, ready to form suspicion but disdaining to entertain it, prone more than another to suffer from misplaced confidence, but the last in the world to confess its injuries even to itself.

He had never seemed more energetic, never showed better spirits than now. His hawks struck their quarry, his hounds ran into their game, his horses carried him far ahead of his fellow-sportsmen. His advice was listened to at their meetings, his opinions quoted at their tables, his popularity was at its height with all the country-gentlemen of the neighbourhood. He cheered lustily in the field, and drank his bottle fairly at the fireside, yet all the time, under that smooth brow, that jovial manner, that comely cheek, there lurked a something which turned the chase to penance, and the claret to gall.

He was not jealous, far from it. *He* jealous—what degradation! And of Cerise—what sacrilege! No, it was not jealousy that thus obtruded its shadow over those sunny moors, athwart that

fair autumn sky; it was more a sense of self-reproach, of repentance, of remorse, as if he had committed some injustice to a poor helpless being, that he could never now repay. A lower nature incapable of the sentiment would in its inferiority have been spared much needless pain. It was as if he had wounded a child, a lamb, or some such weak lovable creature, by accident, and could not staunch the wound. It would have been cowardly had he meant it, but he did not mean it, and it was only clumsy; yet none the less was he haunted by the patient eyes, the mute appealing sorrow that spoke so humbly to his heart.

What if this girl, whose affection he had never doubted, did really not love him after all? What if the fancy that he knew she had entertained for him was but a girl's fancy for the first man who had roused her vanity and flattered her self-esteem? It might be that she had only prized him because she had seen so few others, that her ideal was something quite different, he said in bitterness of spirit, to a rough ignorant soldier, a mere hunting, hawking, north-country baronet, whose good qualities, if he had any, were but a blunt honesty, and an affection for herself he had not the wit to express; whose personal advantages did but consist in a strong

arm, and a weather-browned cheek, like any ploughman on his estate. Perhaps the man who would really have suited her, was of a different type altogether, a refined scholar, an accomplished courtier, one who could overlay a masculine understanding with the graceful trickeries of a woman's fancy, who could talk to her of sentiment, romance affinity of spirits, and congeniality of character. Such a man as this pale-faced priest—not him in particular, that had nothing to do with it! but some one like him—there were hundreds of them whom she might meet at any time. It was not that he thought she loved another, but that the possibility now dawned of her not loving him.

He did not realize this at first. It was long before he could bring himself to look such a privation in the face—the blank it would make in his whole life was too chilling to contemplate—and to do him justice his first thought was not of his own certain misery, but of her lost chances of happiness. If now, when it was too late, she should find one whom she could really love, had he not stood between her and the light? Would he not be the clog round her neck, the curse rather than the blessing of her existence?

Of all this he was vaguely conscious, not actually

thinking out his reflections, far less expressing them, but aware, nevertheless, of some deadening, depressing influence that weighed him down like a nightmare, from which, morning after morning, he never woke.

But this inner life which all men must live, affected the outer not at all. Sir George flung his hawks aloft and cheered his hounds with unabated zest, while Florian held Lady Hamilton's scissors, and helped to tie up her roses, under the grey and gold of the soft autumnal sky.

They had a thousand matters to talk about, a thousand reminiscences in common, now that the old intimacy had returned. On many points they thought alike, and discoursed pleasantly enough, on many they differed, and it was to these, I think, that they reverted with the keenest relish again and again.

Cerise was a rigid Catholic—the more so now that she lived in a Protestant country, and with a husband whose antecedents had taught him to place little value on the mere external forms of religion. One of the dogmas on which she chiefly insisted, was the holiness of the Church, and the separation of the clergy from all personal interests in secular pursuits.

"A priest," said Cerise, snipping off the ends of the matting with which she had tied up her rose-tree, "a priest is priest *avant tout*—that of course. But in my opinion his character is not one bit less sacred outside, in the street, than when he is saying high mass before the altar. He should never approach the line of demarcation that separates him from the layman. So long as he thinks only the thoughts of the Church, and speaks her words, he is infallible. When he expresses his own opinions and yields to his own feelings, he is no longer the priest but the man. He might as well, perhaps better, be a courtier or a Musketeer!"

He stooped low down over the rose-tree, and his voice was very sad and gentle while he replied:

"Far better—far better—a labourer, a lackey, or a shoeblack. It is a cruel lot to bear a yoke that is too heavy for the neck, and to feel that it can never be taken off. To sit in a prison looking into your empty grave and knowing there is no escape till you fill it—perhaps not even then—while all the time the children are laughing at their play outside, and the scent of the summer roses comes in through the bars—the summer roses that your hands shall

never reach, your lips shall never press! Ah! that is the ingenuity of the torture, when perhaps, to wear one of these roses in your bosom for an hour, you would barter your priesthood here, and your soul hereafter!"

"It must be hard sometimes," answered Cerise, kindly—"very hard; but is not that the whole value of the ordeal? What do *we* give up for our faith—even we poor women, who hold ourselves good Catholics?—three hours at most in the week, and a slice of the sirloin or the haunch on Friday. Oh, Florian, it is dreadful to me to think how little I can do to further the work of the Church! I feel as if a thousand strong men were pulling, with all their might, at a load, and I could only put one of my poor weak fingers on the rope for a second at a time."

"My daughter," he answered, assuming at once the sacerdotal character, "the weakest efforts, rendered with a will, are counted by the Church with the strongest. St. Clement says that 'if one, going on his daily business, shall move out of his way but two steps towards the altar, he shall not be without his reward.' Submit yourself to the Church and her ministers, in thought, word, and deed, so will she take your burden on her own shoulders, and

be answerable for your welfare in this world and the next."

It was the old dangerous doctrine he had learned by rote and repeated to so many penitents during his ministration. He saw the full influence of it now, and wished, for one wild moment, that he could be a better Christian, or a worse! But when she turned her eyes on him so hopefully, so trustfully, the evil spirit was rebuked, and came out of the man, tearing him the while, and almost tempting him to curse her—the woman he worshipped—because, for the moment, her face was "as the face of an angel." He had a mind then to return to St. Omer at once—to trust himself no longer with this task, this duty, this penance, whatever their cruelty chose to call it—to confess his insubordination without reserve, and accept whatever penalty the Order might inflict! But she put her hand softly on his arm, and spoke so kindly, that evil desires and good resolutions were dispelled alike.

"Florian," said she, "you will help me to do right, I know. And I, too—I can be of some small aid even to you. You are happy here, I am sure."

"Happy!" he repeated, almost with a sob; and,

half conquering his enemy, half giving in, adopted at last that middle course, which runs so smooth and easy, like a tramway, down the broad road. "I am happy in so far as that, by remaining at Hamilton, I can hope to speed the interests of the true Church. You say that a priest should never mix himself with secular affairs. You little know how, in these evil days, our chief duties are connected with political intrigue—our very existence dependent on the energy we show as men of action and men of the world. Why am I here, Lady Hamilton, do you think? Is it to counsel you, as I used at the convent, and hold your gloves, and look in your face, and tie up your roses? It would be happy for me, indeed, if such were all my duties; for I could live and die, desiring no better. Alas! it is not so. My mission to England does not affect you. Its object is the aggrandizement of your husband."

"Not affect *me!*" she exclaimed, clasping her hands eagerly. "Oh, Florian! how can you say so? Tell me what it is—quick! I am dying to know. Is it a secret? Not now. Here he comes!"

Sir George may, perhaps, have heard these last words, as he ascended the terrace steps.

Whether he heard them or not, he could scarce fail to mark his wife's excited gestures — her brightened eyes — her raised colour — and the sudden check in the conversation, caused by his own arrival.

Again that dull pain seemed to gnaw at his heart, when he thought how bright, and eager, and amused she always seemed in Florian's company.

He had seen the two on the terrace as he rode home across the park, and joined them by the shortest way from the stable, without a tinge of that suspicion he might not be wanted, which was so painful now. Still he kept down all such unworthy feelings as he would have trampled an adder under his heavy riding-boots.

"Bring me a rose, Cerise," he said, cheerily, as he passed his wife. "There are not many of them left now. Here, Florian," he added, tossing him a packet he held in his hand. "A note from pretty Alice at the 'Hamilton Arms.' Have a care, man! there are a host of rivals in the field."

Florian looked at the writing on the cover, and turned pale. This might easily be accounted for, but why should Cerise, at the same instant, have

blushed so red—redder even than the rose she was plucking for her husband?

Perhaps that was the question Sir George asked himself as he walked moodily into the house to dress.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "HAMILTON ARMS."

LIKE many old country places of the time, Hamilton Hill had a village belonging to it, which seemed to have nestled itself into the valley under shelter of the great house, just near enough to reap the benefits of so august a neighbourhood, but at such a distance as not to infringe on the sacred precincts of the deer-park, or on the romantic privacy of the pleasure-grounds.

Where there is a village there will be thirst, and thirst seems to be an Englishman's peculiar care and privilege; therefore, instead of slaking and quenching it at once by the use of water, he cherishes and keeps it alive, so to speak, with the judicious application of beer. A public-house is, accordingly, as necessary an adjunct to an English

hamlet as an oven to a cook-shop, a copper to a laundry, or a powder-magazine to a privateer.

The village of Nether-Hamilton possessed, then, one of these indispensable appendages; but, fortunately for the landlady, its inhabitants were obliged to ascend a steep hill, for the best part of a mile, before they could fill their cans with beer;—I say fortunately for the landlady, because such an exertion entailed an additional draught of this invigorating beverage to be consumed and paid for on the spot. The "Hamilton Arms," for the convenience of posting, stood on the Great North Road, at least half a league, as the crow flies, from that abrupt termination of upland, the ridge of which was crowned by the towers and terraces of Hamilton Hill. Twice a week a heavy lumbering machine, drawn by six, and in winter often by eight, horses, containing an infinity of passengers, stopped for a fresh relay at the "Hamilton Arms;" and, when this ponderous vehicle had once been pulled up, it was not to be set going again without many re-adjustments, inquiries, oaths, protestations and other incentives to delay.

The "Flying-Post" coach, as it was ambitiously called, did not change horses in a minute and a half; a bare-armed helper at each animal to pull

the rugs off, almost before the driver had time to exchange glances with the barmaid, in days of which the speed, esteemed so wondrous then, was but a snail's crawl compared with our rate of travelling now. Nothing of the kind. The "Flying-Post" coach was reduced to a deliberate walk long before it came in sight of its haven, where it stopped gradually, and in a succession of spasmodic jerks, like a musical box running down. The coachman descended gravely from his perch, and the passengers, alighting one and all, roamed about the yard, or hovered round the inn-door, as leisurely as if they had been going to spend the rest of the afternoon at the "Hamilton Arms," and scarcely knew how to get rid of the spare time on their hands. Till numerous questions had been asked and answered—the weather, the state of the roads, and the last highway robbery discussed; packets delivered, luggage loaded or taken off, and refreshments of every kind consumed—there seemed to be no intention of proceeding with the journey. At length, during a lull in the chatter of many voices, one large lumbering horse after another might be seen wandering round the gable-end of the building; two or three ostlers, looking and behaving like savages, fastened the broad buckles and clumsy

straps of harness, in which rope and chain-work did as much duty as leather, and, after another pause of preparation, the passengers were summoned, the coachman tossed off what he called his "last toothful" of brandy, and ascended solemnly to his place, gathering his reins with extreme caution, and imparting a scientific flourish to the thong of his heavy whip.

The inexperienced might have now supposed a start would be immediately effected. Not a bit of it. Out rushed a bare-armed landlady with streaming cap-ribbons—a rosy chamber-maid, all smiles and glances—a rough-headed potboy, with a dirty apron—half-a-dozen more hangers-on of both sexes, each carrying something that had been forgotten—more oaths, more protestations, more discussions, and at least ten more minutes of the waning day unnecessarily wasted—then the coachman, bending forward, chirped and shouted—the poor sore-shouldered horses jerked, strained, and scrambled, plunging one by one at their collars, and leaning in heavily against the pole—the huge machine creaked, tottered, wavered, and finally jingled on at a promising pace enough, which, after about twenty yards, degenerated into the faintest apology for a trot.

But the portly landlady looked after it nevertheless well pleased; for its freight had carried off a goodly quantity of fermented liquors, leaving in exchange many welcome pieces of silver and copper to replenish the insatiable till.

Mrs. Dodge had but lately come to reside at the "Hamilton Arms." Originally a plump comely lass, only daughter of a drunken old blacksmith at Nether-Hamilton, and inheriting what was termed in that frugal locality "a tidy bit of money," she was sought in marriage by a south-country pedlar, who visited her native village in the exercise of his calling, and whose silver tongue persuaded her to leave kith and kin and country for his sake. After many ups and downs in life, chiefly the result of her husband's rascality, she found herself established in a southern seaport at a pot-house called the "Fox and Fiddle," doing, as she expressed it, "a pretty business enough," in the way of crimping for the merchant service; and here, previous to the death of her husband, known by his familiars as "Butter-faced Bob," she made the acquaintance of Sir George Hamilton, then simple captain of "The Bashful Maid," little dreaming she would ever become his tenant so near her old home.

Mrs. Dodge made lamentable outcries for her

pedlar when she lost him; but there can be no question she was much better off after his death. He was dishonest, irritable, self-indulgent, harsh; and she had probably no better time of it at the "Fox and Fiddle," than is enjoyed by any other healthy easy-tempered woman, whose husband cheats a good deal, drinks not a little, and is generally dissatisfied with his lot. He left her, however, a good round sum of money, such as placed her completely beyond fear of want; and after a decent term of mourning had expired, after she had received the condolences of her neighbours, besides two offers of marriage from publicans in adjoining streets, she took her niece home to live with her, sold off the goodwill of the "Fox and Fiddle," wished her rejected suitors farewell, and sought the hamlet of her childhood, to sit down for life, as she said, in the bar of the "Hamilton Arms." "It would be lonesome, no doubt," she sometimes observed, "without Alice; and if ever Alice took and left her, as leave her she might for a home of her own any day, being a good girl and a comely, why then"—and here Mrs. Dodge would simper and look conscious, bristling her fat neck till her little round chin disappeared in its folds, and inferring thereby that, in the event of such a contingency, she might

be induced to make one of her customers happy, by consenting to embark on another matrimonial venture before she had done with the institution for good and all. Nor, though Mrs. Dodge was fifty years of age, and weighed fifteen stone, would she have experienced any difficulty in finding a second husband, save, perhaps, the pleasing embarrassment of selection from the multitude at her command. And if her aunt could thus have "lovyers," as she said, "for the looking at 'em," it may be supposed that pretty Alice found no lack of admirers in a house-of-call so well frequented as the "Hamilton Arms;" pretty Alice, with her pale brow, her hazel eyes, her sweet smile, and soft gentle manners, that made sad havoc in the hearts of the young graziers, cattle-dealers, and other travellers that came under their comforting influence off the wild inhospitable moor. Even Captain Bold, the red-nosed "blood," as such persons were then denominated, whose calling nobody knew or dared ask him, but who was conspicuous for his flowing wig, laced coat, and wicked bay mare, would swear, with fearfully ingenious oaths, that Alice was prettier than any lady in St. James's; and if she would but say the word, why burn him, blight him, sink him into the lowest depths of Hamilton Mere, if *he*, John Bold,

wouldn't consent to throw up his profession, have his comb cut, and subside at once into a homely, helpless, hen-pecked, barn-door fowl.

But Alice would not say the word, neither to Captain Bold nor to any honester man. She had been true to her sailor-love, through a long weary time of anxiety, and now she had her reward. Slap-Jack was domiciled within a mile of her, by one of those unforeseen strokes of fortune which he called a "circumstance," and Alice thanked heaven on her knees day and night for the happiness of her lot.

It may be supposed that her sweetheart spent much of his leisure at the "Hamilton Arms." Though he got through half the work of Sir George's household, for the foretop-man never could bear to be idle, his occupations did not seem so engrossing as to prevent a daily visit to Alice. It was on one of these occasions that, gossiping with Mrs. Dodge, as was his wont, he observed a gold cross heaving on her expansive bosom, and taxed her with a favoured lover and a speedy union forthwith.

"Go along with you," wheezed the jolly landlady, in no way offended by the accusation. "It's our new lodger as gave me this trinket only yesterday. Lovyers! says you. 'Marry!' as my poor Bob used to say, '*his* head is not made of the wood they cut

blocks from;' an' let me tell you, Master Slap-Jack, a man's never so near akin to a fool as when he's a-courtin'. Put that in your pipe, my lad, and smoke it. Why Alice, my poppet, how you blush! Well, as I was a-sayin', this is a nice civil gentleman, and a well-spoken. Takes his bottle with his dinner, and, mind ye, he *will* have it o' the best. None of your ranting, random, come-by-chance roysterers, like Captain Bold, who'll sing as many songs and tell as many—well, *lies* I call 'em, honest gentleman—over a rummer of punch, as would serve most of my customers' two gallons of claret and a stoup of brandy to finish up with."

"There's not much pith in that Captain Bold," interposed Slap-Jack, contemptuously. "You put a strain on him, and see if he don't start somewhere. Captain, indeed! It's a queer ship's company where they made *him* skipper, askin' your pardon, Mrs. Dodge."

Slap-Jack had on one occasion interrupted the captain in a warmer declaration to his sweetheart than he quite relished, and hated him honestly enough in consequence.

"Hoity-toity!" laughed the landlady. "The captain's nothing to me. I never could abide your black men; and I don't know that they're a bit

better set off by wearing a red nose. The captain's Alice's admirer, not mine; and I think Alice likes him a bit too sometimes, I do!"

This was said, as the French express it, "with intention." It made Alice toss her head; but Slap-Jack only winked.

"I know better," said he. "Alice always *was* heart of oak; as true as the compass; wasn't you, my lass? See how she hoists her colours, if you do but hail her! No, no, Aunt Dodge—for aunt you'll be to me afore another year is out—it's your broad bows and buxom figure-head as brings the customers cruising about this here bar, like flies round a honey-pot. Come, let's have the rights now of your gold cross. Is it a keepsake, or a charm, or a love-token, or what?"

"Love-token!" repeated Mrs. Dodge, in high glee. "What do you know of love-tokens? Got a wisp of that silly girl's brown hair, maybe, and a broken sixpence done up in a rag of canvas all stained with sea-water! Why, when my poor Bob was a-courtin' *me*, the first keepsake as ever he gave me was eighteen yards of black satin, all off of the same piece, and two real silver bodkins for my hair, as thick a'most as that kitchen poker. Ay, lass! it was something like keeping company in my

day to have a pedlar for a bachelor. Well, well; our poor sailor-lad maybe is as good as here and there a one after all. Who knows?"

"Good enough for *me*, aunt," whispered Alice, looking shyly up at her lover from the dish she was wiping ere she put it carefully on the shelf.

Mrs. Dodge laughed again. "There's as good fish in the sea, Alice, as ever came out of it; and a maid may take her word back again, ay, at the church door, if she has a mind. The foreign gentleman in the blue room, him as gave me this little cross, he says to me only yesterday morning, 'Madame,' says he, as polite as you please, 'no man was ever yet deceived by a woman, if he trusted her entirely. I repose entire confidence in madame,' that was *me*, Alice; 'her face denotes good manners, a good heart, a good life.' Perhaps he meant good living; but that's what he said. 'I am going to ask madame to charge herself with an important trust for me, because I rely securely on her integrity.' Oh! he spoke beautiful, I can tell you. 'In case of my absence,' says he, 'from your respectable apartments, I will confide to you a sealed packet, to be delivered to a young man who will call for it at a certain hour on a certain day that I shall indicate before I leave. If the young man

does not appear, I can trust madame to commit this packet to the flames.' He was fool enough to add," simpered Mrs. Dodge, looking a little conscious, "'that it was rare to see so much discretion joined to so much beauty,' or some such gammon; but of course I made no account of that."

"If he paid out his palaver so handsome," observed Slap-Jack, "take my word for it the chap's a Papist."

But Mrs. Dodge would not hear of such a construction being put on her lodger's gallantry.

"Papist!" she repeated, angrily. "No more a Papist than you are! Why, I sent him up a slice o' powdered beef, was last Friday, with a bit of garnishing, parsnips, and what not, and he eats it up every scrap, and asks for another plateful. 'Papist!' says you; and what if he were? I tel you if he was the Pope o' Rome come to live respectable on my first floor, he's a sight more to my mind for a lodger than his friend the captain! Papist, indeed! If I wanted to lay my hand on a Papist, I needn't to travel far for to seek one. Though, I will say, my lady's liker a hangel nor a French woman, and if all the Papists was made up to her pattern, why, for my part, I'd up and cry 'Bless the Pope!' with the rankest on 'em all!"

It was obvious that this northern district took no especial credit to itself for the bigotry of its Protestantism, and Mrs. Dodge, though a staunch member enough of the reformed religion, allowed no scruples of conscience to interfere with the gains of her hostelry, nor perhaps entertained any less kindly sentiments towards the persecuted members of the Church of Rome, that they formed some of her best customers, paying handsomely for the privacy of their apartments, while they ate and drank of the choicest during their seclusion.

But this unacknowledged partiality was a bone of contention between his sweetheart's aunt and Slap-Jack. The latter prided himself especially on being what he termed True-Blue, holding in great abhorrence everything connected with Rome, St. Germains and the Jacobite party. He allowed of no saints in the calendar, except Lady Hamilton, whom he excepted from his denunciations, by some reasoning process of his own which it is needless to follow out. Nevertheless, Alice knew right well that such an argument as now seemed imminent was the sure forerunner of a storm. "Aunt," said she, softly, "I've looked out all the table-linen, and done my washing-up till supper-time. If you want nothing particular, I'll run out and get a

breath of fresh air off the moor before it gets dark."

"And it's time for me to be off, Aunt Dodge!" exclaimed Slap-Jack, as Alice knew full well he would. "Bless ye, we shall beat to quarters at the Hill, now in less than half an hour, and being a warrant-officer, as you may say, o' course it's for me to set a good example to the ship's company. Fare-ye-well, Mrs. Dodge, and give the priest a wide berth, if he comes alongside, though I'll never believe as you've turned Papist, until I see you barefoot at the church-door in a white sheet with a candle in your hand!"

With this parting shot, Slap-Jack seized his hat and ran out, leaving Mrs. Dodge to smile blandly over the fire, fingering her gold cross, and thinking drowsily, now of her clean sanded floor, now of her bright dishes and gaudy array of crockery, now of her own comely person and the agreeable manners of her lodger overhead.

Meanwhile it is scarcely necessary to say that although Slap-Jack had expressed such haste to depart, he lingered in the cold wind off the moor not far from the house-door, till he saw Alice emerge for the mouthful of fresh air that was so indispensable, but against which she fortified her-

self with a checked woollen shawl, which she muffled, in a manner he thought very becoming, round her pretty head.

Neither need I describe the start of astonishment with which she acknowledged the presence of her lover, as if he was the very last person she expected to meet, nor the assumed reluctance of her consent to accompany him a short distance on his homeward way, nor even the astonishment she expressed at his presumption in adjusting her muffler more comfortably, and exacting for his assistance the payment that is often so willingly granted while it is so vehemently refused. These little manœuvres had been rehearsed very often of late, but had not yet begun to pall in the slightest degree. The lovers had long ago arrived at that agreeable phase of courtship, when the reserve of an agitating and uncertain preference has given way to the confidence of avowed affection. They had a thousand things to talk about, and they talked about them very close together, perhaps because the wind swept bleak and chill over the moor, in the gathering twilight. It was warmer no doubt, and certainly pleasanter, thus to carry two faces under one hood. It is impossible to overhear the conversation of people in such close juxtaposition, nor is it usually,

we believe, worth much trouble on the part of an eavesdropper. I imagine it consists chiefly of simple, not to say idiotic, remarks, couched in corresponding language, little more intelligible to rational persons than that with which a nurse endeavours to amuse a baby, whose demeanour, by the way, generally seems to express a dignified contempt for the efforts of its attendant. When we consider the extravagances of speech by which we convey our strongest sentiments, we need not be surprised at the follies of which we are guilty in their indulgence. When we recal the absurdities with which an infant's earliest ideas of conversation must be connected, can we wonder what fools people grow up in after life?

It was nearly dark when they parted, and a clear streak of light still lingered over the edge of the moor. Alice, indeed, would have gone further, but Slap-Jack had his own ideas as to his pretty sweetheart being abroad so late, and the chance of an escort home from Captain Bold, returning not quite sober on the wicked bay mare, so he clasped her tenderly in his arms, receiving at the same time a hearty kiss given ungrudgingly and with goodwill, ere she fleeted away like a phantom, while he stood watching till the last flutter of her

dress disappeared through the gloom. Then he, too, turned unwillingly homeward, with a prayer for the woman he loved on his lips.

If Alice looked round, it was under the corner of her muffler, and she sped back to her gleaming saucepans, her white dishes, and the warm glow of her aunt's kitchen, with a step as light as her happy maiden heart.

But there were only two ways of re-entering the "Hamilton Arms," up a gravel-walk that led straight to the front door across a washing green, separated from the high road by a thick close-cut hedge, or through the stable-yard and back entrance into the scullery. This last ingress was effectually closed for the present by the arrival of Captain Bold, rather more drunk than common, swearing strings of new and fashionable oaths, while he consigned his wicked bay mare to the charge of the admiring ostler. Alice heard his reckless treble screaming above the hoarse notes of the stableman before she turned the corner of the house, and shrank back to enter at the other door. But here also, much to her dismay, she found her retreat cut off. Two gentlemen were pacing up and down the gravel path, in earnest conversation. One of them, even in the dusk, she recognised as

the inmate of their Blue-room, who had given her aunt the gold cross. The other was a younger, táller and slimmer man than his companion. Both were dressed in dark plain garments, gesticulating much while they spoke, and seemed deeply engrossed with the subject under discussion. Foolish Alice might well have run past unnoticed, and taken shelter at once in the house, but the girl had some shy feeling as to her late tryst with her sweetheart, and shrank perhaps from the good-humoured banter of the elder man, whose quiet, sarcastic smile she had already learned to dread. So she stopped short and cowered down with a beating heart under shelter of the hedge, thinking to elude them, as they turned in their walk, and glide by unobserved into the porch.

They talked with such vehemence that had they been Englishmen she would have thought they were quarrelling. Their arms waved, their hands worked, their voices rose and fell. The elder man was the principal speaker, and seemed to be urging something with considerable vehemence, to which the other was disinclined; but none of his arguments, pointedly as they were put, arrested Alice's attention so much as two proper names muttered in a tone of deprecation by his companion. These were

"Lady Hamilton" and "Slap-Jack." Of the first she was almost sure—in the latter she could not be mistaken!

Her experience on a southern seaboard, to which many smugglers from the opposite coast resorted, had taught Alice to understand the French language far better than she could speak it.' With her ears sharpened and her faculties roused by the mention of her lover's name, she cowered down in her hiding-place, and listened, rapt, fearful, attentive, like a hare with the beagles on its track.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRESSURE.

"DO you suppose I came here to amuse myself?" asked Malletort, passing his arm under his companion's so as to turn him round, on the gravel walk within a yard of Alice's hiding-place. "Do you think it is agreeable to reside in a pot-house where eggs and bacon form the *ne plus ultra* of cookery, and if a man cannot drink sour claret, he must be satisfied with muddy ale? Every one of us has to sacrifice his own identity, has to consecrate himself entirely to such an effort as ours. Look at me, Florian, and ask yourself, was I born for such a life as this, to vegetate by the wayside in the dullest province of the dullest country in Europe—my only society, that awful landlady, my

only excitement, the daily fear of a blunder from that puzzle-headed brigand who calls himself Captain Bold, and whom I can hang at any moment I please, or I would not trust him five yards from my side? If I should be discovered and unable to get out of the way in time, why it *might* go very hard with me, but even against this contingency I have provided. You would find all the directions you need drawn out in our own cipher, and consigned to my respectable hostess. I have left the money for her weekly account sealed up and addressed to Mrs. Dodge on my chimney-piece, also the day and hour of your visit, as we have agreed. If we *both* fall into difficulties, which is most improbable, the packet will be burned, for I can trust the woman, I believe, and with so much the more confidence, that I doubt if any one on this side the channel has the key to our cipher. So far, you observe, I have provided for all contingencies, and now, my good Florian, what have *you* done? You tell me you have failed with his confidential servant!"

"What, Slap-Jack!" answered Florian, and the name brought Alice's heart to her mouth as the two priests again approached her hiding-place. "Impossible! I tell you he is as true as steel. Why, he sailed with us in the brigantine. We were

all like brothers. Ah, Malletort, you cannot understand these things!"

"I can understand any scruple, any superstition, any weakness of humanity, for I see examples every day," replied the Abbé, "but I cannot and *will* not understand that such imaginary obstacles are insurmountable. Bah! You have *carte blanche* in promises, you have even a round sum to draw upon in hard cash. Will you tell me that man's honesty or woman's virtue is not to be bought if you bid high enough? The whole business is simply a game of *bouillote*. Not the best card, nor even the deepest purse, but the boldest player sweeps the stakes. Florian, I fear you have done but little in all these long weeks; that was why, at great risk, I sent you a note, begging an interview, that I might urge on you the importance of despatch."

"It was a risk," observed Florian. "The note was brought by Sir George himself."

Malletort laughed. "He carried his fate without knowing it," commented the Abbé. "After all, it is the destiny of mankind. Every one of us bears about with him the germ of that which shall some day prove his destruction. I don't know that one's step is the heavier till palsy has begun to tingle, or one's appetite the worse till digestion already fails.

Come, Florian, the plot is nearly ripe now, and there is little more time to lose. We must have Sir George in it up to his neck. He carries this district with him, and I am then sure of all the country north of the Trent. You have impressed on him, I trust, that it is an earldom to begin with, if we win?"

"And if we lose?" asked the other, wistfully.

Malletort smacked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, making, at the same time, a significant gesture with his hand under his ear.

"A leap from a ladder would finish it," he remarked, abruptly. "For that matter we are all in the same boat. If a plank starts, it is simply *Bon soir la compagnie!*"

Florian could control himself no longer. "Are you a man?" he burst out. "A man! Are you anything less devilish than the arch-fiend himself, to bid me take part in such a scheme? And what a part! To lure my only friend, my comrade—whose bread has fed me in want, whose hand has kept me in danger—down, down, step by step, to crime, ruin, and a shameful death. What am I? What have I done, that you should ask me to join in such a plot as this?"

"What you *are*, is a novice of the Society of

Jesus," answered Malletort, coldly, "degraded to that rank for what you have *done*, which I need hardly remind you. Florian, it is well that you have to deal with me, who am a man of the world no less than a priest, instead of some stern provincial who would report your disobedience to the Order, even before he referred you to its statutes. Look your task firmly in the face. What is it? To make your friend, the man for whom you profess this ludicrous attachment, one of the first subjects in England. To raise his charming wife—they tell me she has grown more charming than ever—to a station for which she is eminently fitted; and all this at a certain risk of course, but what risk?—that the best organized movement Europe has seen for a hundred years, should fail at the moment of success, and that Sir George should be selected for a victim, amongst a score of names nobler, richer, more obnoxious to the Government than his own. And even then. If worst came to worst, what would be Lady Hamilton's position? An heiress in her own right, a widow further enriched by marriage, beautiful, unencumbered, and free. I cannot see why you should hesitate a moment."

Florian groaned. "Have mercy on me!" he muttered, hoarsely, writhing his hands in despair.

"Can you not spare me this one trial, remit this one penance? Send me anywhere—Tartary, Morocco, Japan. Let me starve in a desert, pine in a dungeon, suffer martyrdom at the stake; anything but this, and I submit myself cheerfully, willingly, nay, thankfully. Malletort, you *must* have a human heart. You are talented, respected, powerful. You have influence with the Order. You have known me since I was a boy. For the love of Heaven have pity on me, and spare me this!"

The Abbé was not one of those abnormal specimens of humanity who take pleasure in the sufferings of their fellow-creatures. It could not be said of him that his heart was cruel or malicious. He had simply no heart at all. But it was a peculiarity he shared with many governing spirits, that he grew cooller and cooller in proportion to the agitation with which he came in contact.

He took a pinch of snuff, pausing for the refreshment of a sneeze before he replied:

"And with the next report I furnish to the Order send in your refusal to obey? Your refusal, Florian; you know what that means? Well, be it so. The promotion to a coadjutor's rank is revoked, the former novice is recalled, and returns to St. Omer at once, where I will not enlarge on his reception.

Riding post to the seaboard he meets another traveller, young, handsome, well provided, and unscrupulous, hurrying northward on a mission which seems to afford him considerable satisfaction It is Brother Jérome, we will say, or Brother Boniface; the one known in the world as Beauty Adolphe of the King's Musketeers, the other as Count Victor de Rosny, whose boast it is that love and credit are universally forced on him, though he has never paid a tradesman nor kept faith with a woman in his life. Either of these would be an agreeable addition to the family party up there on the hill. Either would labour hard to obtain influence over Sir George, and do his best or worst to be agreeable to Lady Hamilton. Shall I forward your refusal by to-morrow's courier, Florian, or will you think better of it, and at least take a night to consider the subject in all its bearings?"

Florian pondered, passed his hand across his brow, and looked wildly in his adviser's face.

"Not a moment!" said he, "not a moment! I was wrong—I was impatient—I was a fool—I was wicked, *mea culpa, mea culpa.* What am I that I should oppose the will of the Order—that I should hesitate in anything they think fit to command? What is a Jesuit priest, what is *any* one, after all,

but a leaf blown before the wind—a bubble floating down the stream? There is no free agency—Destiny rules the game. The Moslem is not far wrong when he refuses to stir out of the destroyer's way, and says "It is ordained!" I am wiser now—I seem to have woke up from a dream. What is it you would have me do? Am I to put poison in his wine, or cut Sir George's throat to-night when he is asleep? You have only to say the word—are you not my superior? Am I not a Jesuit? I must obey!"

Alice, still crouching behind the close-cut hedge, might well be alarmed at the scraps she overheard of such a dialogue as this. Malletort, on the contrary, watched his junior with the well-satisfied air of a cook who perceives the dish on which his skill is concentrated, bubbling satisfactorily towards projection. He allowed the young man's emotion to exhaust itself ere he plied him again with argument, and knowing that all strong feelings have their ebb and flow like the tide, trusted to find him more malleable than ever, after his late outbreak.

It was difficult to explain to Florian that his superiors desired him to make love to Lady Hamilton, in order that he might bring her husband into their hands; and the task was only

rendered the more delicate by the young Jesuit's hopeless yet sincere attachment to his hostess—an attachment which had in it the germ of ruin or salvation, according to his own powers of self-control—such an attachment as the good call a trial, and the weak a fatality.

At times the Abbé almost wished he had selected some less scrupulous novice for the execution of this critical manœuvre—one like Brother Jérome or Brother Boniface, who would have disposed himself to it with all the relish and goodwill of those who resume a favourite occupation which circumstances have obliged them, for a time, to forego. Such tools would have been easier to manipulate; but perhaps he reflected their execution would not be so effectual and complete. The steel was dangerously flexible and elastic, but then it was of the truest and finest temper forged. He flattered himself it was now in the hands of a workman.

"Let us talk matters over like men of the world, my dear Florian," said the Abbé, after they had made two turns of the walk in silence, approaching within a foot of Alice while he spoke. "We are neither of us boys, but men playing a game at *bouillote*, *ombre*, *picquet*, what you will, and holding nearly all the winning cards in our hands.

You are willing, I think, to believe I am your friend?"

Florian shuddered, but nodded assent.

"Well, then, as friends," continued the Abbé, "let there be no concealment between us. I have already gone over the details of our *programme*. I need not recapitulate the plan of the campaign, nor, to a man of intelligence like yourself, need I insist on the obvious certainty of success. All dispositions of troops, and such minor matters, are left to our commanders, and they number some of the first soldiers of the age. With such affairs we need not meddle. Intellect confines itself to intrigue, and leaves hard knocks to the hard-fisted, hard-headed fools whose business it is to give and take them. I have been busy since I came here—busier almost than you could believe. I have made acquaintance with ——, and ——, and ——."

Here the Abbé sank his voice to a cautious whisper, so that Alice, straining her ears to listen, could not catch the names he enumerated.

"Although they seemed lukewarm at first, and are esteemed loyal subjects of King George, they are ripe for a Restoration now. By the by, will these people never forget to call it a Restoration? Nothing affects an Englishman so strongly as a

phrase, if it be old enough. I have seen a red-nosed squire of to-day fidget uneasily in his chair, and get quite hot and angry, if you mentioned the Warrant of the Parliament; call it the law of the land, and he submits without a murmur. They eat beef, these islanders, and they drink ale, muddy ale, so thick, my dear Florian, you might cut it with a knife. Perhaps that is what makes them so stupid. It is hard work to drive an idea into their heads, but when once there, it must be admitted, you cannot eradicate it. If they are the most obstinate of opponents, they are also the staunchest of partisans. Well, I have a score of their names here in my pocket—men who have pledged themselves to go through with us, even if it comes to cold steel, sequestration—ay, hanging for high treason! Not a man of them will flinch. I can undertake to say so much; and this, you observe, my dear Florian, would greatly facilitate *our* escape in the event of a failure. But in the entire list I have none fit to be a leader—none whose experience would warrant him in taking command of the others, or whose adventurous spirit would urge him to assume such authority. Sir George Hamilton is the very man I require. He is bold, reckless, ambitious, not entirely without brains, and has been

a soldier of France. Florian, we *must* have him at the head of the movement. It is your duty to put him there."

Florian bowed submissively.

"I can only persuade," said he; "but you do not know your man as well as I do. Nothing will induce Sir George so much as to have a horse saddled until he can see for himself that there is a reasonable prospect of success. I have heard him say a hundred times, 'Never show your teeth till your guns are shotted;' and he has acted up to his maxim, ever since I have known him, in all the relations of life. It is, perhaps, presumptuous in me to advise one of your experience and abilities, but I warn you, be careful in this instance. On every account I am most anxious that our undertaking should not miscarry. I am pledged to you myself, but, believe me, I must have something more than empty assurances to enlist my friend."

"Quite right," answered the other, slapping him cheerfully on the shoulder; "quite right. A man who goes blindly into these matters seldom sees his way very clearly afterwards. But what would your friend have? We possess all the material of success, only waiting to be set in motion; and this I can prove to him in black and white. We

have men, arms, artillery, ammunition, and money. This insurrection shall not fail, like some of its predecessors, for lack of the grease that keeps all human machinery in motion. A hundred thousand *louis* are ready at an hour's notice, and another hundred thousand every week till the new coinage of James the Third is issued from the mint. Here, in the next province, in Lancashire, where the sun never shines, every *seigneur*, squire—what are they called?—has mounted his dependants, grooms, falconers, huntsmen, tenants—all horsemen of the first force. Five thousand cavalry will be in the saddle at twenty-four hours' notice. Several battalions of Irish soldiers, brave and well-disciplined as our own, are assembled on the coast of Normandy, waiting only the signal to embark. Our infantry have shoes and clothes; our cavalry are provided with farriers and accoutrements; our artillery, on *this* occasion, not without draught-horses and harness. Come to me to-morrow afternoon, and I will furnish you with a written statement of our resources for Sir George's information. And Florian, you believe honestly that he might be tempted to join us?"

The other was revolving a thousand probabilities in his mind.

"I will do my best," he answered, absently.

"Then I will risk it," replied Malletort. "You shall also have a list of the principal noblemen and gentlemen who have given in their adhesion to their rightful sovereign. I have upstairs a manifesto, to which these loyal cavaliers have attached their signatures. I never trust a man by halves, Florian, just as I never trust a woman at all. Nothing venture, nothing have. That paper would hang us all, no doubt; but I will confide it to you, and take the risk. Yours shall be the credit of persuading Sir George to subscribe to it in his own hand."

Florian assented, with a nod. Too much depressed to speak, he felt like some poor beast driven to the shambles, blundering on, dogged and stupefied, to its fate.

Malletort's keen perceptions detected this despondency, and he endeavoured to cheer him up.

"At the new Court," said he, "we shall probably behold our retired Musketeer commanding the Guards of his Sovereign, and carrying his gold baton on the steps of the throne. A peer, a favourite, a Councillor of State—what you will. His beautiful wife the admired and envied of the three kingdoms. They will owe their rank, their grandeur,

their all, to Florian de St. Croix. Will not he—will not *she*—be grateful? And Florian de St. Croix shall choose his own reward. Nothing the Church can offer will be esteemed too precious for such a servant. I am disinterested for once, since I shall return to France. In England, a man may exist; were it not for the climate, he might even vegetate, but it is only in Paris that he can be said to live. Florian, it is a glorious prospect, and the road to fortune lies straight before us."

"Through an enemy's country," replied the other, gravely. "Nothing shall persuade me but that the mass of the people are staunch to the Government."

"The mass of the people!" repeated Malletort, contemptuously; "the mass of the people, neither make revolutions nor oppose them. In point of fact, they are the women and children who sit quietly at home. It is the highest and the lowest who are the discontented classes, and if you set these in motion—the one to lead in front, the other to push behind—why, the mass of the people, as you call them, may be driven whichever way you please, like a flock of sheep into a pen. Listen to those peasants singing over their liquor, and tell me if their barbarian ditties do not teach you

which way the tide of feeling acts at present amongst the rabble?"

They stopped in their walk, and through the open window of the tap-room could hear Captain Bold's treble quavering out a Jacobite ballad of the day, no less popular than nonsensical, as was attested by the stentorian chorus and wild jingling of glasses that accompanied it.

"We are done with sodden kale,
Are we not? Are we not?
We are done with sodden kale,
Are we not?
And the reptile in his mail,
Though he tore with tooth and nail
We have got him by the tail,
Have we not?

"We will bring the Stuart back,
Will we not? Will we not?
We will bring the Stuart back,
Will we not?
With a whip to curl and crack
Round the Hanoverian pack,
And 'twill lend King George a smack,
Will it not?

"We are done with rebel rigs,
Are we not? Are we not?
We are done with rebel rigs,
Are we not?

We will teach them 'Please the pigs!'
English tunes for foreign jigs,
And the devil take the Whigs!
Will he not? Will he not?
And the devil take the Whigs!
Will he not?"

While the priests were thus occupied, Alice, darting past them unobserved, took refuge in the house.

CHAPTER IX.

POOR EMERALD.

OF all passions that tear and worry at the human heart jealousy seems to be not only the most painful, but the most contradictory. Anger, desire, avarice, revenge, all these propose to themselves a certain end, in the accomplishment of which there is doubtless an evil satisfaction for the moment, however closely remorse may tread on the heels of indulgence, but jealousy, conscious only of its own bitterness, knows not even what to hope or what to fear. It hates itself, though its torture is purely selfish, it hates another whom all the while it madly loves. It is proud, yet stoops to meanness—cruel, yet quivers with the pain it inflicts, desperate while cowardly, pitiless though sensitive, obstinate and

unstable, a mass of incongruities, and a purgatory from which there is neither present purification nor prospective escape.

It may please a woman to feel that she can make her lover jealous—it may even please her, in her feminine relish for dominion, to mark the painful effect of her power; but if it were possible to love and be wise, he would know that he had better hold his hand in the fire without wincing, than let her discover the force of the engine with which she can thus place him on the rack. Some women are generous enough not to inflict a torture so readily at command, but even these take credit for their forbearance, and assume, in consequence, a position of authority, which is sometimes fatal to the male interest in such a partnership. The sweetest kisses to a woman are those she gives on tip-toe. A man, at least such a one as is best worth winning, cares for a woman because she loves *him*. A woman, I imagine, is never so devoted as when she feels there is yet something more to be gained of that dominion at which she is always striving, but which she is apt to undervalue when attained.

Now, if she has taken it into her head to make her lover jealous, and finds his equanimity utterly

undisturbed, the result is a mortifying and irremediable defeat to the aggressive Amazon. She has hazarded a large stake and won nothing. Worse than this, she is led to suspect the stability of her empire, and sees it (because women always jump to conclusions) slipping like ice out of her grasp. Besides, she has put herself in the wrong, as after a burst of tears and a storm of unfounded reproaches she will herself acknowledge; and the probable result of her operations will be a penitent and unqualified submission. Let the conqueror be high-minded enough to abstain from ever casting this little vagary in her teeth, and he will have reason to congratulate himself on his own self-command for the rest of the alliance.

But if the indulgence of jealousy be thus impolitic in a lover, it is not only an unworthy weakness, but a fatal mistake on the part of a husband. The doubts and fears, the uncertainties and anxieties, that are only ludicrous in the outer courts of Cupid, become contemptible at the fireside of Hymen, derogatory to the man's dignity, and insulting to the woman's faith. There are few individuals of either sex, even amongst the worst natures, but can be safely trusted, if only the trust be complete and unqualified. It is the little needless reservation, the

suspicion rather inferred than expressed, that leads to breach of confidence and deceit. With ninety-nine women out of every hundred, the very fact of possessing full and unquestioned freedom constitutes the strongest possible restraint from its abuse. To suspect a wife, is to kindle a spark of fire that eats into, and scorches, and consumes the whole comfort of home; to let her know she is suspected, is to blow that spark into a conflagration which soon reduces the whole domestic edifice to ruins.

There are some noble natures, however, that unite with generosity of sentiment, keen perceptive faculties, and a habit of vigilance bordering on suspicion. These cannot but suffer under the possibility of betrayal, the more so that they despise themselves for a weakness which yet they have not power to shake off. They stifle the flame indeed, and it burns them all the deeper to the quick—they scorn to cry out, to groan, even to remonstrate, but the sternest and bravest cannot repress the quiverings of the flesh under the branding-iron, and perhaps she, of all others, from whom it would be wise to conceal the injury, is the first to find it out. Wounded affections chafe in silence on one side, insulted pride scowls and holds aloof on

the other, the evil festers, the sore spreads, the breach widens, the gloom gathers; it is well if some heavy blow falls to bring the sufferers to their senses, if some grand explosion takes place to clear the conjugal atmosphere, and establish a footing of mutual confidence once more.

Cerise could hardly keep her tears back when Sir George, passing hastily through the hall, booted as usual for the saddle, would stop to address her in a few common-place words of courtesy, with as much deference, she told herself bitterly, as if she had been an acquaintance of yesterday. There were no more little foolish familiarities, no more affected chidings, betraying in their childish absurdities the overflowing of happy affection, no more silly jests of which only themselves knew the import. It was all grave politeness and ceremonious kindness now. It irritated, it maddened her—the harshest usage had been less distressing. If he would only speak cruel words! If he would only give her an excuse to complain!

She could not guess how this change had been caused, or if she did guess, she was exceedingly careful not to analyse her suppositions, but she hunted her husband about wistfully, looking penitent without a fault, guilty without a crime, longing

timidly for an explanation which yet she had not courage to demand.

The room at Hamilton in which Sir George spent his mornings on those rare occasions when he remained in-doors, was, it is needless to observe, the gloomiest and most uncomfortable apartment in the house. Its furniture consisted chiefly of guns, fishing-rods, and jack-boots. It was generally very untidy, and contained for its only ornaments a model of the brigantine, and a sketch in crayons of his wife. Whenever Sir George thought he had anything very particular to do, it was his habit to retire here and barricade himself in.

The morning after Florian's interview with Malletort, Cerise took up her post at the door of this stronghold, with a vague hope that chance might afford an opportunity for the explanation she desired.

"If he is really angry," thought poor Cerise, "and I am sure he must be, perhaps he will have taken my picture down, and I can ask him why, and he will scold me, and I shall put my arms round his neck, and he cannot help forgiving me then! Nobody else would be so unkind without a reason. And yet he is not unkind; I wish he were! and I wish, too, I had courage to speak out. Ah! it

would be so much easier if I did not care for him!"

Lady Hamilton's hands were very cold while she stood at the door. After waiting at least five minutes she took courage, gave a timid little knock, and went in.

Nothing in the aspect of the apartment or its inmate afforded the opportunity she desired. Sir George, tranquilly engaged with a pair of compasses and a foot-rule, was whistling softly over a plan of his estates. Her own picture hung in its usual place. Glancing at it, she wondered whether she had ever been so pretty, and if so, how he could have got tired of her already. His calmness, too, was in irritating contrast to her own agitation. Altogether she did not feel half so meek as on the other side of the door.

He looked up from his employment, and rose.

"What is it, my lady?" he asked, pushing the implements aside. "Can I be of any service to you before I get on my horse? Emerald is at this moment saddled and waiting for me."

The tone was good-humoured enough, but cool and unconcerned as if he had been speaking to his grandmother. Besides, scarcely yet more than a bride, and to be called *my lady!* It was unbearable!

"If you are in such a hurry," she answered, angrily, "I will not detain you. What I had to say was of no importance, and probably would not in the least interest *you*. I am sorry I came in."

"Not at all," he replied, in the same matter-of-course voice. "When I am at leisure I am always glad of your society. Just now, I fear, I cannot take advantage of it. I must be absent all the morning, but St. Croix is, doubtless, at home, and will keep you company."

Guarded as was his tone, either her woman's ear detected a false note in the mention of Florian's name, whom he seldom spoke of so ceremoniously, or her woman's intuition taught her to suspect the true grievance. At any rate, she persuaded herself she ought to be more displeased than she really felt. It would have been only right to show it. Now was the time to get upon her high horse, and she would have mounted at once, but that her blushes would not be kept down. It was too provoking! What must her husband think of them? She could have burst out crying, but that would be infinitely worse. She turned away, therefore, and assuming all the dignity she could muster, walked off to her own apartment without another word.

Sir George did not follow. Had he done so, it

might have altered his whole morning's employment, to see his young wife fling herself down on her knees at the bedside, and weep as if her heart would break.

No, *he* flung himself into the saddle, and in five minutes was alone with Emerald on the moor.

I wonder what the good horse thought of his rider, when he felt his head steadied by the strong familiar hand, the well-known limbs grasping his sides with pliant energy, the caressing voice whispering its cheering words of caution and encouragement? Did he know that his master urged him to his speed because the care that is proverbially said to sit behind the horseman *cannot* keep her seat on a fine goer, in good condition, when fairly in his swing? Did he know that while that smooth, powerful stride, regular and untiring as machinery, swept furlong by furlong over the elastic surface of the moor, she must be left panting behind, to come up indeed at the first check, rancorous and vindictive as ever, but still beaten by a horse's length at least, so long as the excitement of the gallop lasted, and the extreme pace could hold?

Emerald enjoyed it as much as his master. When pulled up, he stopped unwillingly, his whole frame glowing with health and energy, his eye glancing,

his ear alert, his broad red nostril drinking in the free moorland air like a cordial, and his bit ringing cheerfully, while he tossed his head in acknowledgment of the well-earned caress that smoothed the warm supple skin on his swelling neck.

The horse seemed a little puzzled too, looking round in vain for his friends the hounds, as if he wondered why he had been brought thus merrily over the moor, good fun as it was, without any further object than the ride.

In this matter there was little sympathy between man and horse. Sir George was thinking neither of hounds, nor hawks, nor any other accessories of the chase. He neither marked the secluded pool in which he had set up the finest stag of the season at bay last month, nor the ledge of rocks into which he ran his fox to ground last week. He was far back in the past. He was a young Musketeer again, with neither rank, nor wealth, nor broad acres, but with that limitless reversion of the future which was worth all his possessions ten times told. Yet even thus looking back to his earliest manhood, he could not shake himself free from the memory of Cerise. Ever since he could remember, that gentle face and those blue eyes had softened his waking thoughts,

and haunted him in his dreams; there was no period in his life at which she had not been the ideal of his imagination, the prize he desired. Even if he had not married her, he thought with a groan, he would still be cursed with this gnawing, festering pain that drove him out here into the wilderness for the mere bodily relief of incessant action. If he had not married her! Another thought stung him now. Perhaps then she might have continued to love him. Were they all alike, these women? All vain, unstable, irrational creatures; best acted on by the jugglery of false sentiment, alive only to the unworthy influence of morbid pique, or unbridled passion, tempted to evil by an infamous notoriety, or dazzled by the glare of an impossible romance? He asked himself these questions, and his own observation afforded no satisfactory reply.

He had lived much at the Court of France, when that Court, with all its splendour, and all its refinement, was little distinguished by self-denial in man or self-restraint in woman. Amongst those of his own age and sphere, he was accustomed to hear conjugal fidelity spoken of as a prejudice not only superfluous but unrefined and in bad taste. The wife *as* a wife was to be considered a proper object of pursuit; the husband to be borne with as an

encumbrance, but in right of his office habitually to be derided, out-witted, and despised. That a woman should care for the man to whom she had plighted her faith at the altar seemed an absurdity not to be contemplated; that a man should continue to love the girl he had chosen was a vulgarity to which no gentleman would willingly plead guilty. Such were the morals of the stage, such was the too common practice of real life. And George had laughed with the rest at the superstition of matrimony, had held its sanctity in derision, perhaps trifled with its vows *en mousquetaire*.

And now was the punishment overtaking him at last? Was the foundation of *his* happiness, like that of others, laid in sand, and the whole edifice crumbling to pieces in his very sight? It was hard, but he was a man, he thought, and he must bear it as best he might. As for the possibility that Cerise should actually love another, he dismissed such an idea almost ere it was formed. That was not the grievance, he told Emerald aloud, while he stood by the good horse on the solitary moor, it was that Cerise should not love *him!* He could scarcely believe it, and yet he could see she was unhappy, she for whose happiness he would sacrifice so willingly wealth, influence, position, life itself, every-

thing but his honour. When he thought of the pale pining face, it seemed as if a knife was driven into his heart.

He sprang into the saddle, and once more urged his horse to a gallop. Once more the brown heathery acres flew back beneath his eyes, but Emerald began to think that all this velocity was a waste of power when unaccompanied by the music of the hounds, and stopped of his own accord to look for them within a bow-shot of the great north road where it led past the "Hamilton Arms."

Ordinary people do not usually talk to themselves, but I believe every man speaks aloud to his horse.

"Quite right, old fellow!" said Sir George, as if he were addressing a comrade. "I may as well stop and have a glass of beer, for I am as hot as you are, and I dare say twice as thirsty."

Emerald acquiesced with a snort, and a prolonged shake, the moment his rider's foot touched the ground, and Sir George filling the whole of the narrow passage to the bar, bounced against Florian de St. Croix returning from an interview with the Abbé on the first floor. Each must have been thinking of the other, for both exclaimed mentally, "The very man!" while at the same instant Slap-Jack, looking rather sheepish and not

in his usual spirits, slunk out of another room and tried to leave unobserved.

"Foretop! there," halloaed Sir George, good-humouredly, "as you are aloft, look smart and make yourself useful. See that lubber gives Emerald a go-down of chilled water, and tows him about at a walk till I come out."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Slap-Jack, his whole face brightening up. He loved to be so addressed by his old commander; and although he was to-day not without his own troubles, or he would scarce have been here so early, he set to work to obey instructions with a will.

Florian accompanied the new arrival into the bar, where Mrs. Dodge, all smiles and ribbons, drew for this honoured guest a measure of the best with her own fat hands; while Alice, who looked as if she had been crying, hovered about, admiringly watching Sir George quench his thirst as if he had been some rare and beautiful animal she had paid her penny to see.

"Good stuff!" said the baronet, setting down his jug with a sigh; "better than *vin ordinaire*, or even three-water grog. Eh, Florian?"

But Florian's mind was bent on other matters. "You are always so occupied," said he, "that I can

never catch you for half an hour alone. Will you have your horse led home, and walk back the short way with me? We had more leisure on board 'The Bashful Maid,' after all; especially in the Trades."

Sir George assented cheerily. For the moment his gloomy thoughts fled at the sound of the other's voice. They were tried comrades in many a rough adventure, and it takes a good deal to turn a man's heart from an old friend.

"Of course I will," he assented, putting his arm through Florian's. "We can cross the deer-park, and go over the footbridge above the waterfall. It saves nearly half a mile. Slap-Jack," he added, emerging from the house, "take that horse home, under easy sail, d'ye mind? and see him well dressed over when you get to the stable."

Then he and Florian strolled quietly away to cross the deer-park and thread a certain picturesque dingle adorned by the above-mentioned waterfall. It was the show bit of scenery at Hamilton Hill, and the track leading to it was so precipitous as to be impassable by any four-footed animal less nimble than a goat.

It was Slap-Jack's duty to conduct Emerald by an easier route to his own stable; and for this pur-

pose the adventurous seaman proceeded to "get up the side," as he called it, an ascent which he effected with some difficulty, and so commenced his voyage with considerable prudence, according to orders, "under easy sail."

But Emerald's blood was up after his gallop. The seaman's awkward seat, and unskilled hand on the rein, irritated him considerably. He fretted, he danced, he sidled, he snatched at his bridle, he tossed his head, he showed symptoms of mutiny from the very beginning.

"I knowed as we should make bad weather of it," said Slap-Jack, relating his adventure that evening in the servants' hall, "when we come into open sea. Steer he wouldn't, and every time I righted him, he broached-to, as if he was going down stern foremost. So I lashed the helm amid-ships, and held on by my eyelids to stand by for a capsize."

In truth the horse soon took the whole affair into his own management, and after one or two long reaching plunges, that would have unseated Slap-Jack had he not held on manfully by the mane, started off at a furious gallop, which brought him to his own stable-yard in about five minutes from the time he left the inn door.

Cerise, wandering pale and listless amongst her

roses, heard the clatter of hoofs entering at this unusual pace, and rushed to the stables in some alarm. She was relieved to find that no serious casualty had occurred, and that Slap-Jack, very much out of breath, with his legs trembling and powerless from the unwonted exercise, was the only sufferer. He gasped and panted sadly; but she gathered that he had been ordered to bring the horse quietly home, at which she could not forbear smiling, and that Sir George was going to walk back the short way. It was a chance to be seized eagerly. She had been very low and dispirited all the morning, wishing she had spoken out to him before he went, and now here came another opportunity. Cerise was still young, and, to use the graphic expression of her own country, "a woman to the very tips of her fingers." She ran up-stairs, put on her prettiest hat, and changed her breast-knots for fresh ribbons of newer gloss and a more becoming colour. Then she fluttered out through her garden, and crossing the home-park with a rising colour and a more elastic step, as the fresh air told upon her animal spirits, reached one end of the wooden footbridge as the two gentlemen arrived at the other.

She had only expected *one*. It was a disappoint-

ment; more, it was an embarrassment. She coloured violently, and looked, as she felt, both agitated and put out. Sir George could not but observe her distress, and again his heart ached with the dull wearing unacknowledged pain.

He jumped to conclusions; a man under such an influence always does. It seemed clear to him that his wife must have chosen this direction for her walk in order to meet the Jesuit. He did not blame Florian, for the priest had himself proposed they should return together, and could not, therefore, have expected her. Stay! Was this a blind? He stole a glance at him, and thought he seemed as much discomposed as her ladyship. All that he could disentangle afterwards. In the meantime, one thing alone seemed clear. That Cerise, contrary to her usual habits, had come this distance on foot to meet her lover, and had found—her husband! He laughed to himself fiercely, with a grim savage humour, and felt as once or twice formerly in a duel, when his adversary, taking unfair advantage, had been foiled by his own act. Well, he would fight this battle at least with all the skill of fence he knew; patiently, warily, scientifically, without loss of temper or coolness, neglecting no precaution, overlooking no mistake, and giving no quarter.

He could not help thinking of his old comrade, Bras-de-fer, as he remembered him, one gloomy morning in Spain, stripped and in silk stockings on the wet turf outside the lines, with the deadliest point in three armies six inches from his throat, and how nothing but perfect self-command and endurance had given his immovable old comrade the victory. His heart softened when he thought of those merry campaigning days, but not to Lady Hamilton, nor to the pale thoughtful Jesuit on the other side.

It was scarcely a pleasant walk home for any one of the three. Florian, though he loved the very ground she trod on, was disconcerted at her ladyship's inopportune appearance, just as he thought he was gaining ground in his canvass, and had prepared the most telling arguments for the conversion of his proselyte. Moreover, he had now passed the stage at which he could converse freely with Cerise in company, and grudged her society even to the man who had a right to it. Alone with her, he had plenty to say; but, without approaching forbidden topics, he had acquired a habit of conversing on abstruse and speculative subjects, interesting enough to two persons in the same vein of thought, but which strike even these as exaggerated when sub-

mitted to the criticism of a third. Many a pleasant and harmonious duet jangles painfully when played as a trio. He was impatient now of any interference with Lady Hamilton's opinions. These he considered his own, in defiance of a thousand husbands; and so strangely constituted is the human mind, he could presume to be jealous even of the vague, shadowy, unsubstantial share in her mind that he imagined he possessed.

So he answered in monosyllables, and took nothing off the constraint under which they all laboured. Sir George conversed in a cold formal tone on indifferent matters, and was as unlike himself as possible. He addressed his remarks alternately to Florian and Cerise, scanning the countenance of each narrowly the while. This did not tend to improve their good understanding; and Lady Hamilton, walking with head erect and set face, looking straight before her, dared not trust herself to answer. It was a relief when they reached the house, and most of all to her, for she rushed up-stairs and locked herself into her own room, where she could be miserable to her heart's content.

It was hard for this fair young wife, good, loving, and true, to seek that refuge so cruelly wounded twice in one day.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN BOLD.

I HAVE mentioned that Slap-Jack, too, while he rode perforce so rapidly homewards, was pursued by a black care of his own, waiting but a momentary halt to leap up behind. Even with a foretop-man—though, perhaps, no swain ought to have a better chance—the course of true love does not always run smooth. There was a pebble now ruffling Slap-Jack's amatory stream, and that pebble was known at the "Hamilton Arms" as Captain Bold.

He might have had a score of other designations in a score of other places; in fact, he was just the sort of gentleman whom one name would suffice less than one shirt; but here, at least, he was welcomed, and, to a certain extent, trusted under that title.

Now Captain Bold, if he ever disguised himself for the many expeditions in which he boasted to have been engaged, must have done considerable violence to his feelings by suppressing the three peculiarities for which he was most conspicuous, and in which he seemed to take the greatest pride. These specialities were the Captain's red nose, his *falsetto* voice, and his bay mare. The first, he warmed and comforted with generous potations at all hours, for though not a deep, he was a frequent drinker; the second, he exercised continually in warbling lyrics tending to the subversion of morals —in shrieking out oaths denoting a fertile imagination, with a cultivated talent for cursing—and in narrating interminable stories over his cups, of which his own triumphs in love and war formed the ground-work; the third, he was never tired of riding to and fro over the moor, of going to visit in the stable, or of glorifying in the tap-room for the edification of all-comers, expatiating on her shape, her qualities, her speed, her mettle, and her queer temper, amenable to no authority but his own.

The captain's first acquaintance with Mrs. Dodge dated some two months back, when he entered the hostelry one stormy evening, and swaggered about

the stable-yard and premises as if thoroughly familiar with the place. This did not astonish the landlady, who, herself a late arrival, concluded he was some old customer of her predecessor's; but, hazarding that natural supposition to an ancient ostler, who had been at the "Hamilton Arms" from a boy, and never slept out of the stable since he could remember, she was a little surprised to learn old Robin had no recollection whatever of the Captain, though he was perfectly well acquainted with the mare. That remarkable animal had been fed and dressed over by his own hands, he declared, only last winter, and was then the property of a Quaker from the East Riding, a respectable-looking gentleman as ever he clapped eyes on—warm, no doubt, for the mare was in first-rate condition, and her master paid him from a purse full of broad pieces—a *wet* Quaker, old Robin thought, by reason of his smelling so strong of brandy, when he mounted before daylight in the morning.

Mrs. Dodge, conversing with her guest of the wonderful mare, mentioned her old servant's reminiscences.

"Right!" exclaimed the Captain, with his accustomed flourish—"right as my glove! or, I should say, my dear madam, right as your own bodice!

A Quaker—very true! A man about my size, with a—well, a *prominent* nose. Pale, flaxen-haired; would have been a good-looking chap with a little more colouring; and respectable—most respectable! Oh, yes! that's the Quaker I bought her of, and a good bargain I made. We'll drink the Quaker's health, if you please. A very good bargain!"

And the Captain laughed heartily, though Mrs. Dodge could not, for the life of her, see the point of his jest.

But, while she reprobated his profane conversation, and entertained no very profound respect for his general character, the Captain was yet a welcome guest in Mrs. Dodge's *sanctum*. His anecdotes were so lively—his talk was so fluent—he took off his glass with so gallant a flourish to her own and her niece's health, paying them, at the same time, such extravagant compliments of the newest town mode—that it was impossible to damp this genial spirit with an austerity which must have been assumed, or rebukes uttered by lips endeavouring to repress a smile.

But with Alice it was not so; she held the Captain in a natural abhorrence, and shrank from him, as people sometimes do from a toad or other reptile, when she happened to meet him in passages,

staircases, or out-of-the-way corners, never permitting him to approach her, unless protected by the company of her aunt.

Mrs. Dodge, however, would sometimes spend an hour and more, in certain household duties, up-stairs, leaving Alice to mind the bar during her absence. The girl was singing over her needlework, according to custom, thinking, in all probability, of Slap-Jack, when, much to her annoyance, the Captain's red nose protruded itself over the half-door, followed, in due course, by his laced coat, his jack-boots, and the rest of his gaudy, tarnished, and somewhat dissipated person.

Seeing Alice alone, he affected to start with pleasure, made a feint of retiring, and then insinuated himself towards the fireplace, with a theatrical gallantry that was to her, of all his airs and graces, the most insupportable.

"Divine Alice!" he exclaimed, flourishing his dirty hand, adorned with rings; "alone in her bower, and singing over her sampler like a siren. The jade Fortune owed honest Jack Bold this turn. Strike him blind, if she didn't! He comes for a vulgar drain, and lo! a cordial—the elixir of life—the rosy dew of innocence—the balmy breath of beauty!"

"What d'ye lack, sir?" asked Alice, contemptuously ignoring this rhodomontade, and stretching her pretty hand towards a shelf loaded with divers preparations of alcohol, well-known to the visitor.

"What I lacked, my sweetest," said the unabashed Captain, "when I entered this bower of bliss and bastion of beauty, was a mere mortal's morning draught—a glass of strong waters, we will say, with a clove in it, or perhaps a mouthful of burnt brandy, to keep out the raw moorland air. What I lack now, since I have seen your lovely lips, seems to be the chaste salute valour claims from beauty. We will take the brandy and cloves afterwards!"

So speaking, the Captain moved a little round table out of his way, and, taking off his cocked hat with a flourish, advanced the red nose and forbidding face very close to Alice, as if to claim the desired salute. In his operations, the skirt of his heavily-laced coat brought work, work-box, thimble, and all to the ground.

Alice stooped to pick them up; when she rose again her colour was very bright, possibly from the exertion, and she pointed once more to the bottles.

"Give your orders, sir," said she, angrily, "and go! I am sure I never—I never expected to be rude to a customer, but—there—it's too bad—I won't stand it, I won't—not if I go up to my aunt in her bedroom, this very minute!"

Poor Alice was now dissolved in tears, but, true to her instincts, filled the Captain his glass of brandy all the same.

The latter drank it slowly, relishing every drop, and, keeping his person between Alice and the half-door, seemed to enjoy her confusion, which, obviously, from the conceited satisfaction of his countenance, he attributed to an unfortunate passion for himself. Suddenly her face brightened, a well-known footstep hastened up the passage, and the next moment Slap-Jack entered the bar.

Alice dashed away her tears, the Captain assumed an attitude of profound indifference, and the new arrival looked from one to the other with a darkening brow.

"What, again?" said he, turning fiercely on the intruder, and approaching very close, in that aggressive manner which is almost equivalent to a blow. "I thought as I'd given *you* warning already to let this here young woman be. You think as you're lying snug enough, maybe, in smooth water, with

your name painted out, and a honest burgee at your truck; but I'll larn you better afore I've done with you, if you comes cruising any more in my fishing-ground. There's some here as 'll make you show your number, and we'll soon see who's captain then!"

Honest Jack Bold, as he called himself, was not deficient in self-command. Sipping his brandy with the utmost coolness, he turned to Alice, and, motioning towards Slap-Jack, boiling over within six inches of him, observed, in his high-quavering voice:

"Favoured lover, I presume! Visits here, I hope, with our good aunt's sanction. Seems a domestic servant by his dress, though I gather, from the coarseness of his language, he has served before the mast!—a sad come-down, sweet Alice! for a girl with your advantages. These seamen, I fancy, are all given to liquor. Offer your bachelor something to drink, and score it, if you please, to my account. A sad come-down!—a sad come-down! Why, burn me, Mistress Alice, with your good looks, you might almost have married a gentleman—you might, indeed! Sink me to the lowest depths of matrimonial perdition, if you might not!"

Slap-Jack could have stood a good deal, but to

be offered a dram by a rival in this off-hand way, through the medium of his own sweetheart, was more than flesh and blood could swallow. In defiance of Alice's entreaties, who was horribly frightened at the prospect of a quarrel, and as pale now as she had been flushed a few minutes back, he shook a broad serviceable fist in the Captain's face, and burst out:

"A gentleman! you swab! What do *you* know about gentlemen? All the sort as *you've* seen is them that hangs at Tyburn, and look, if you're not rove up there yourself some fine morning, my saucy blade, with your nightcap over your ears, and a bunch of rue in your hand. Gentleman, indeed! Now look you here, Captain John Bold, or whatever other *alias* your papers may show when they're overhauled, if ever I catches of you in here alone, a parsecutin' of my Alice, or even hears o' your so much as standin' off-and-on, a watchin' for her clearin' out, or on the open moor, or homeward bound, or what not, I'll smash that great red nose of yours as flat as a Port-Royal jelly-fish, you ugly, brandy-faced, bottle-nosed, lop-sided son of a gun!"

The Captain had borne with considerable equanimity his adversary's quarrelsome gestures and

threats of actual violence, keeping very near the door, corporeally, indeed, and entrenching himself morally, as it were, in the dignity of his superior position, but at these allusions to his personal appearance he lost all self-control. His face grew livid, his very nose turned pale, his eyes blazed, and his hand stole to the short cutlass or hanger he carried at his side. Something in Slap-Jack's face, whose glance followed the movement of his fingers, checked any resort to this weapon, and even in his fury, the Captain had the presence of mind to place himself outside the half-door of the bar, but when there he caught hold of it with both hands, for he was trembling all over, and burst forth:

"You think the sun is on *your* side of the hedge, my fine fellow, I dare say, but you'll know better before a week's out. Ay, you may laugh, but you'll laugh the other side of your mouth when the right end is uppermost, as uppermost it will be, and I take you out on the terrace with a handkerchief over your eyes, and a file of honest fellows, with carbines loaded, who are in my pay even now. Ay, you'll sing small then, I think, for all your blare and bluster to-day. You'll sing small, d'ye hear? on the wet grass under the windows at

Hamilton Hill, and your master 'll sing small with his feet tied under his horse's belly, riding down the north road and on his way to Tyburn, under a warrant from King Ja——. Well, a warrant from the King; and that Frenchified jade, your missus, 'll sing small——"

But here the Captain sprang to the door, at which his mare was standing ready, leaped to the saddle and rode off at a gallop, cursing his tongue the while, which, in his exasperation, he had suffered to get so entirely the better of his discretion.

It was high time; Slap-Jack, infuriated at the allusion to his lady, had broken from the gentle grasp of Alice, and in another moment would have been upon him. He even followed the mare for a few paces and shook his fist at the retreating figure fleeting away over the moor like the wind; then he returned to his sweetheart, and drowned his wrath in a flagon of sound ale, drawn by her sympathising hands.

He soon ceased to think of his opponent's threats, for when the excitement of action was over, the seaman bore no malice and nursed no apprehensions, but Alice who, like many silent, quiet women, was of a shrewd and reflective turn of mind,

pondered them deeply in her heart. She seemed to see the shadow of some great danger threatening her lover and the family whose bread he ate.

CHAPTER XI.

SIR MARMADUKE.

A WOMAN'S wits are usually quick to detect intrigue, and are sharpened all the more keenly when she suspects danger to one she loves.

The threats Captain Bold had been so indiscreet as to utter, afforded an explanation of much that had hitherto puzzled Alice in the habits and demeanour of her aunt's guests. It seemed clear enough now, that the shrewd, dark-clothed gentleman up-stairs, and his friend from the Hill, were involved in a treasonable plot, of which her abhorred suitor with the bay mare was a paid instrument. From the hints dropped by the last, it looked as if some signal vengeance was contemplated against Sir George Hamilton, and worse

still, against her own beloved Slap-Jack. Alice was not the girl to sit still with folded hands and bemoan herself in such a predicament. Her first impulse was at once to follow Sir George home and warn him of all she knew, all she suspected, but reflecting how little there was of the former, and how much of the latter—remembering, moreover, that one chief conspirator was his fast friend, and then in his company—she hesitated to oppose her own bare word against the latter's influence, and resolved to strike boldly across the moor till she saw the chimneys of Brentwood, and tell her tale to Sir Marmaduke Umpleby, a justice of the peace, therefore, in all probability, a loyal subject of King George.

It was a long walk for a girl accustomed to the needlework and dish-scouring of an indoor life, but Alice's legs had been stretched, and her lungs exercised, on the south-country downs, till she could trip over a Yorkshire moor as lightly and as gracefully, if not so swiftly, as a hind. Leaving word, then, for her aunt that she should not be back till after dark, she put on her best shoe-buckles, her lace pinners, her smartest hat, and tucking her red stuff gown through its pocket-holes, started boldly on her mission in the teeth of an east wind.

Brentwood was a snug-looking long grey house, lying low amongst tall trees in a little green nook of the moor, sheltered by brown swelling undulations that rose all round. A straight road, rough in some places, swampy in others, and execrable in all, led up to the door, between two dilapidated stone walls coped with turf. There was no pretence of porch or other abutment, as in newer residences, nor were there curves round clumps of plantation, sweeps to coast flower-beds, nor any such compromise from a direct line in the approach to the house. The inmates of Brentwood might see their visitors for a perspective of half a mile from the front windows, and at these windows would take up their position from dawn till dark.

Dame Umpleby and her five daughters were at their usual station when Alice appeared in sight. These young ladies, of whom the eldest seemed barely fifteen, were being educated under their mother's eye, that is to say, they were writing out recipes, mending house-linen, reading the "Pilgrim's Progress," and working samplers, according to their several ages. They had a spinet also, somewhat out of repair, on which the elder girls occasionally practised, but father would not stand this infliction within ear-shot, and father was now

enjoying his after-dinner slumbers in their common sitting-room.

Sir Marmaduke did not appear to advantage in the attitude he had chosen. His wig was off, and hung stately on its own account over a high-backed chair. His round smooth head was discoloured in patches like the shield of a tortoise, his heavy features looked the heavier that they were somewhat swollen after eating, the lower jaw had dropped comfortably to its rest, and his whole frame was sunk in an attitude of complete and ungainly repose.

A half-smoked pipe had dropped from his relaxed fingers to the floor, and a remnant of brown ale stood at his elbow in a plain silver tankard on the table.

The apartment was their usual family parlour, as it was then called, and therefore plainly, not to say meanly, furnished. Sir Marmaduke being a gentleman of ancient blood and considerable possessions, owned flocks and herds in plenty, fertile corn-land under the plough, miles of pasturage over the hill. He kept good horses in his stable, fleet greyhounds in his kennel, and a cast of hawks in his mews, only surpassed by those of Sir George Hamilton, but he could not afford, he said, to waste his substance on

"Frenchified luxuries," and this opprobrious term seemed to comprise all such vanities as carpets, curtains, couches, pictures, and ornaments of every description. For indoors, he argued, why, he didn't frequent that side of the house much himself, and what had been good enough for his mother must be good enough for his wife and the girls. When hard pressed, as be sure he was by these on the score of certain damask hangings and gorgeous carpets at Hamilton Hill, he would reply that Lady Hamilton was the sweetest woman in Europe, whereat his audience dissented, but that extravagance was her crying fault, only excusable on the ground of her foreign birth and education, and it couldn't go on. It could *not* go on! He should live to see his neighbour ruined, and sold up, but he should be sorry for it, prodigiously sorry! for Hamilton was a good fellow, very strong in the saddle, and took his bottle like a man!

He had spoken to the same effect just before he dropped asleep, and Dame Umpleby with her daughters had continued the subject in whispers till it died out of itself just as the far-off figure of Alice coming direct to the house afforded fresh food for conversation.

Margery being the youngest, saw the arrival some

half-second before her sisters, and for one rapturous moment believed her dearest visions were realized, and little Red Riding Hood was coming to pay them a visit in person; but this young woman being about five years of age, and of an imaginative temperament, was already accustomed to disillusions, and felt, therefore, more disgusted than surprised when her eldest sister Janet suggested the less startling supposition that it was Goody Round's granddaughter on an errand for red salve and flannel, offering at the same time to procure those palliatives in person from the store-room. Janet, like most eldest girls in a large family, was as steady as a matron, taking charge of the rest with the care of an aunt, and the authority of a governess. But the mother's sight was sharper than her children's. "Bessie Round's not half the height of that girl," said she, rising for a better look. "See how she skims across the stepping-stones at the ford! She's in a hurry, whoever she is! But that is no reason, Margery, why you shouldn't learn your spelling, nor that I should have to unpick the last half-dozen stitches in Marian's sampler. Hush! my dears, I pray you! Less noise, or you will wake father!"

Pending this discussion, Alice, whose pace was at least twice as good as Bessie Round's, had

reached the house. She looked very pretty, all flushed and tumbled out of the moorland breezes, and Dame Umpleby's heart reproached her for the hundredth time that she had allowed her husband to establish as a rule the administration of justice in his own room, unhampered by her presence. He had once in their early married life admitted her assistance to his judicial labours, but such confusion resulted from this indulgence that the experiment was never repeated.

Though Sir Marmaduke had been married a score of years, and was the model of a steady-going, middle-aged gentleman, such is the self-tormenting tendency of the female mind that his wife could not mark, without certain painful twinges, the good looks of this visitor waiting at the hall-door, lest her errand should prove as usual—"A young woman, if you please, wants to see Sir Marmaduke on justice business!"

Such twinges are generally prophetic. Long before Margery and Marian had settled a disputed point as to the identity of the wolf and little Red Riding Hood's grandmother in the story-book, a plethoric serving-man, who had obviously been employing his leisure in the kitchen, like his master in the parlour, entered with a red shining face, and

announced Alice's arrival in the very words his mistress knew so well.

Sir Marmaduke woke up with a start, rubbed his eyes, his nose, the whole of his bald head, and replied as usual:

"Directly, Jacob, directly. Offer the young woman a horn of small ale, and show her into the justice-room."

It was a tradition at Brentwood that no visitor, however humble, should walk six steps within the threshold dry-lipped, and old Jacob, who loved a gossip only less than a drink, was exceedingly careful not to break through this hospitable practice.

Sir Marmaduke, blinking like an owl in the daylight, adjusted his wig, shook himself to rights, and, ignoring his wife's uneasiness, wandered off scarce half-awake, to receive the new arrival in the justice-room.

There were few eavesdroppers at Brentwood, least of all at that hour of the day. A general stagnation habitually pervaded the establishment from dinner-time till dusk. The men slumbered over the fire in the hall, the women, at least the elder ones, crossed their arms under their aprons, and dozed in the kitchen; the younger maids stole out to meet their bachelors in the wood-house or the

cattle-sheds. Even Rupert, the old mastiff, retired to his kennel, and unless the provocation was of an extraordinary nature, refused to open more than one eye at a time, so that fear was uncalled-for, which Alice obviously entertained, lest her communication to Sir Marmaduke should be overheard.

The latter concluding it was the usual grievance, cast a hasty glance at the girl as he passed on to the leathern arm-chair that formed his throne, but seating himself thereon and obtaining a full view of her face, gave a start of recognition, and exclaimed in surprise:

"Why, it's Mistress Alice! Take a chair, Mistress Alice, and believe me, you're welcome. Heartily welcome, however tangled be the skein you've brought me to unravel."

Pretty Alice of the "Hamilton Arms" was as well known as the sign of that hostelry itself to every hard-riding, beer-drinking, cattle-jobbing, country gentleman within fifty miles. Sir Marmaduke often said, and sometimes swore, that "he didn't care how they bred 'em in London and thereabouts, but to *his* mind Alice was the likeliest girl he saw north o' Trent, be t'other who she might!"

The object of his admiration, standing very near

the door, hoped "Lady Umpleby and the young ladies was well," a benevolent wish it seemed she had walked all this distance to express, for she immediately broke down, and began to adjust plaits in the hem of her pinners with extreme nicety.

Sir Marmaduke, marking her confusion, suspected it *must* be the old business after all.

"Take a seat, my dear," repeated he, paternally. "Don't ye be frightened; nobody will hear ye here. Take your own time, and tell your own story."

Thus adjured, Alice, still close to the door, looked anxiously round, and whispered:

"Oh! Sir Marmaduke, are you quite sure nobody can hear us?"

The Justice smiled, and pulled his wig straight. It was evident she had something very secret to confide. He was glad she had come to him at once, and what a pretty girl she was! Of course, he would stand her friend. He told her so.

"Oh! Sir Marmaduke," said Alice, "it's something dreadful. It's something I've found out. I know I shall get killed by some of them! It's a plot, Sir Marmaduke! That's what it is. There!"

The Justice started. His brow clouded, and his very wig seemed to come awry. He was a stout hearted gentleman enough, and feared danger

certainly less than trouble. But a plot! Ever since he could remember in his own and his father's time, the word had been synonymous with arrests, imprisonments, authorized oppression, packed juries, commissions of inquiry, false witness, hard swearing, and endless trouble to justices of the peace.

It was, perhaps, the one thing of all others that he most dreaded, so his first impulse was, of course, to ignore the whole matter.

"Plot! my dear. Pooh! Nonsense! What do you know of plots, except a plot to get married, you little jade? Hey? Plot! There's no such thing in these days. We smothered the whole brood, eggs and all, in Fifteen. We'll give you a drop of burnt sherry, and send you home behind Ralph on a pillion. Don't ye trouble your pretty head about plots, my dear. If you'd seen as many as I have, you'd never wish for another."

Alice thought of Slap-Jack, and collected her ideas. "I'm sure," said she, "I wouldn't have taken the liberty of coming to trouble your honour, but I thought as you would like to know, Sir Marmaduke, being as it concerns Sir George Hamilton, who's aunt's landlord, you know, Sir Marmaduke, and his sweet lady; and if they was to come for to be taken and carried to London town with their feet

tied under their horses' bellies, Sir Marmaduke, why whatever would become of us all?"

The picture that Alice conjured up was too much for her, and she dried her tears on her apron.

Sir Marmaduke opened his eyes wider than he had done since he closed them for his afternoon nap. "Sir George Hamilton!" he repeated, in great astonishment; "how can he be implicated? What d'ye mean, my dear? Dry your eyes, there's a good girl, and tell your story from the beginning."

She had recovered her composure now, and made her statement lucidly and without reserve. She detailed the whole circumstances of her lover's dispute with Captain Bold, and the latter's threats, from which she gathered, reasonably enough, that another Jacobite rising was imminent, in which their party were to be successful, whereby the loyal subjects of King George, including the Hamiltons, Slap-Jack, her aunt, and herself, were to be ruined and utterly put to confusion. She urged Sir Marmaduke to lay his hands at once on the conspirators within reach. Three of them, she said, would be together at the "Hamilton Arms" that very evening. She did not suppose two of the gentlemen would make much resistance, as they seemed to be priests; and fighting, she thought,

could not be their trade; while as for the red-nosed Captain with his bay mare, though he talked very big, and said he had served in every country in Europe, why, she would not be afraid to promise that cook and herself could do his business, for that matter, with a couple of brooms and a slop-pail.

Sir Marmaduke laughed, but he was listening very attentively now, altogether changed from the self-indulgent slumberer of half an hour ago. As she continued her story his interest became more and more excited, the expression of his face cleared from lazy indifference into shrewd penetrating common-sense, and denoted the importance he attached to her communication, of which not a word escaped him.

At the mention of the red-nosed Captain with his bay mare, he interrupted her, dived into a table-drawer, from which he produced a note-book, and referred to an entry amongst its red-lined pages.

"Stop a moment, Mistress Alice," said he, turning over the leaves. "Here it is. Bay mare, fast, well bred, kicks in the stable, white hind-foot, star, and snip on muzzle. Owner, middle height, speaks in a shrill voice, long nose, pale face, and flaxen hair, in a club."

Alice's eyes kindled with the first part of this

description, but she seemed disappointed when he reached the end.

"That's not our Captain, Sir Marmaduke," said she. "Our Captain's got a squeaky voice, sure enough; but his hair is jet-black, and his face, especially his nose, as red, ay, red as my petticoat. It's the moral of the mare, to be sure, and a wicked beast she is," added Alice, reflectively.

Sir Marmaduke pondered. "Is your Captain, as you call him, a good-looking man?" said he, slyly.

Alice was indignant. "As ugly as sin!" she exclaimed. "Blood-shot eyes, scowling eyebrows, and a seam down one cheek that reaches to his chin. No, Sir Marmaduke, to do him justice, he's a very hard-featured gentleman, is the Captain."

Sir Marmaduke, keeping his finger between the leaves of his note-book, referred once more to the entry.

"Tastes differ, Mistress Alice," said he, good-humouredly. "I think I can recognise the gentleman, though I've got him described here, and by one of your sex too, as 'exceedingly handsome-featured, of commanding presence, with an air of the highest fashion.' Never mind. I knew he was somewhere this side of the border, but did not guess

he was such a near neighbour. If it's any satisfaction, I don't mind telling you, my dear, he's likely enough to be in York gaol before the month's out. In the meantime, don't you let anybody know you've seen me, and keep your Captain, if you possibly can, at the 'Hamilton Arms' till I want him."

Alice curtsied demurely. She had caught the excitement inseparable from everything that resembles a pursuit, by this time, and had so thoroughly entered into the spirit of the game, that she felt she could let the Captain make love to her for an hour at a stretch, red nose and all, rather than he should escape out of their clutches.

"And the other gentlemen?" she asked, glancing at the note-book, as if she thought they too might be inscribed on its well-filled pages. "Him that sits up-stairs writing all day, and him that lives up with Sir George at the Hill, and only comes down our way about dusk. There can't be much harm about that one, Sir Marmaduke, I think. Such a pale, thin, quiet young gentleman, and for all he seems so unhappy, as meek as a mouse."

"Let the other gentlemen alone, Alice," answered the Justice. "You're a good girl, and a pretty one, and you showed your sense in coming over here at once without saying a word to anybody. Now,

you'll take my advice, my dear; I'm sure you will. Get home before it's dark. I'd send you with Ralph and old Dapple, but that it would make a talk. Never mind, you've a good pair of legs, I know; so make all the use you can of them. I don't like such a blooming lass to be tramping about these wild moors of ours after nightfall. Tell your aunt to brew you a posset the moment you get home. If she asks any questions, say I told you to come up here about renewing the licence. Above all, don't tattle. Keep silence for a week, only a week, and I'll give you leave after that to chatter till your tongue aches. And now, Alice, you're a sensible girl, I believe, and not easily frightened. Listen to what these two priests say. Hide behind the window-curtain, under the bed, anywhere, only find out for certain what they're at, and come again to me."

"But they speak French," objected Alice, whereat her listener's face fell, though he smiled well pleased when she added, modestly, "Not but what I know enough to understand them, if I don't have to answer."

"Quite right, quite right, my dear," assented the Justice; "you're a clever girl enough. Mind you show your cleverness by keeping your tongue between your teeth. And now it's high time you were

off. Remember what I've told you. Mum's the word, my dear; and fare ye well."

So the Justice, opening the door for Alice with all courtesy, imprinted such a kiss upon her blooming face, as middle-aged gentlemen of those days distributed liberally without scandal, a kiss that, given in all honour and kindliness, left the maiden's cheek no rosier than before.

Then, as soon as the door was shut, Sir Marmaduke pulled his wig off, and began pacing his chamber to and fro, as was his custom when in unusual perplexity.

"A plot," he reflected; "no doubt of it. Another veritable Jacobite plot, to disturb private comfort and public credit; to make every honest man suspect his neighbour, and to set the whole country by the ears."

Though he had wisely concealed from Alice the importance he really attached to her information, he could not but admit her story was very like many another that had previously warned him of these risings, in one of which, long ago, he had himself been concerned on the other side. His sympathies even to-day were not enthusiastically with his duty. That duty doubtless was, to warn the executive at once.

He wished heartily that he knew which of his friends and neighbours was concerned in the business. It would be terrible if some of his intimates (by no means an unlikely supposition) were at its head. He thought it extremely probable that Sir George Hamilton was only named as a victim for a blind, and had really accepted a prominent part in the rising. Could he not give him a hint he was suspected, in time to get out of the way? Sir Marmaduke was not very bitter against the Jacobites; and perhaps it occurred to him, moreover, that if they should get the upper hand, it would be well to have such an advocate as Sir George on the winning side. He might tell him what he had heard, under pretence of asking his assistance and advice.

At all events he thought he had shut Alice's mouth for the present, by setting her to watch the conspirators closely in her aunt's house. "If she finds *them* out," said Sir Marmaduke, rubbing his bald head, "I shall have timely notice of their doings, and if they find *her* out, why, they will probably change the scene of operation with all haste, and I shall have got an exceedingly awkward job off my hands."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOWL ON THE BIAS.

IT was Sir Marmaduke's maxim, as he boasted it had been his father's and grandfather's, to sleep on a resolution before putting it in practice. He secured, therefore, a good night's rest and a substantial breakfast ere he mounted his best horse to wait upon his neighbour at Hamilton Hill, ordering the grey to be saddled, because Sir George had sometimes expressed his approval of that animal. The lord of Brentwood was sufficiently a Yorkshireman to seize the opportunity of "a deal," even while more important matters were under consideration.

"He was getting on," he meant to tell Sir George. "His nerve was beginning to fail. The grey was as good as gold, but *a little too much of a*

horse for him now. He was scarce able to do the animal justice like a younger man."

And as this suggestion could not but be flattering to the *younger man*, he thought it not improbable his friend might be tempted to purchase on the spot.

So he rode the horse quietly and carefully, avoiding the high road, which would have taken him past the "Hamilton Arms," and, threading a labyrinth of bridleways through the moor, very easy to find for those who were familiar with them, but exceedingly puzzling to those who were not.

The grey looked fresh and sleek, as if just out of the stable, when Sir Marmaduke rode into the courtyard at Hamilton Hill, whence he was ushered by Slap-Jack, who had a great respect for him as a "True Blue, without any gammon," to the terrace where Sir George, her ladyship, and Monsieur de St. Croix were engaged in a game of bowls.

Sir Marmaduke followed boldly, although, finding he had to confront Lady Hamilton, he was at some pains to adjust his neckcloth and tie-wig, wishing, at the same time, he had got on his flowing "Steinkirk" cravat and a certain scarlet waistcoat with gold-lace, now under repair.

The game was proceeding with much noise and

hilarity, especially from Sir George. Florian, an adept at every pastime demanding bodily skill, had already acquired a proficiency not inferior to his host's, who was no mean performer. They were a capital match, particularly without lookers-on; but the baronet remarked, with grim inward sarcasm, that he could generally beat his adversary in the presence of Cerise. The very sound of Lady Hamilton's voice seemed to take Florian's attention off the game.

She was watching the players now with affected interest—smiling encouragement to her husband with every successful rub—bringing all her artless charms to bear on the man whom she had resolved to win back if she could. She was very humble to-day, but no less determined to make a desperate struggle for her lost dominion, feeling how precious it was now, and that her heart would break if it was really gone for ever.

And Sir George saw everything through the distorted glass of his own misgivings.

"All these caressing ways—all these smiles and glances," thought he, bitterly, "only prove her the most fickle of women, or the most hypocritical of wives!"

He could not but acknowledge their power, and

hated himself for the weakness. He could not prevent their thrilling to his heart, but he steeled it against her all the more. The better he loved her, the deeper was her treachery, the blacker was her crime. There should be no haste, no prejudice, no violence, and—no forgiveness!

All the while he poised his bowl with a frank brow and a loud laugh. He sipped from a tankard on the rustic table with a good-humoured jest. With a success which surprised him, and for which he hated himself while he admired, he acted the part of a confiding, indulgent husband towards Cerise—of a hearty, unsuspicious friend towards St. Croix.

And the latter was miserable, utterly and confessedly miserable! Every caress lavished on her husband by the wife, was a shaft that pierced him to the marrow. Every kind word addressed by the latter to himself, steeped that shaft in venom, and sent the evil curdling through his blood.

"Penance," he murmured inwardly. "They talk of penance—of punishment for sin—of purgatory—of hell! Why, *this* is hell! I am in hell already!"

The arrival of Sir Marmaduke, therefore, with his broad brown face, his old-fashioned dress, and

his ungainly manners, was felt as a relief to the whole party; and, probably, not one of them separately would have given him half so gratifying a reception as was now accorded by all three.

Nevertheless, his greeting to Lady Hamilton was so ludicrous in its ceremonious awkwardness, that she could scarcely repress a laugh. Catching Florian's eye, she did, indeed, indulge in a smile, which she hoped might be unobserved. So it was by Sir Marmaduke, whose faculties were completely absorbed in his bow; but her husband noted the glance of intelligence exchanged, and scored it up as an additional proof against the pair.

"Good-morrow, Sir George," continued the new arrival, completing his salutations, as he flattered himself, in the newest mode; "and to you, sir," he added, turning rather sternly upon Florian, whom he was even then mentally committing, under a magistrate's warrant, to take his trial for high treason. "I made shift to ride over thus early in order to be sure of finding my host before he went abroad. Harbouring our stag, as we say, my lady, before he rouses; for if I had come across his blemish in the rack as I rode up the park, it would have been a disappointment to myself, and a disgrace to my reputation as a woodsman."

Cerise did not in the least understand, but she bowed her pretty head and answered:

"Yes, of course—clearly—so it would."

"Therefore," continued Sir Marmaduke, somewhat inconsequently, for the sweet foreign accent rang in his ears and heated his brain, as if he had been a younger man. "Therefore, Sir George, I thought you might like to have another look at Grey Plover before I send him to Catterick fair. He stands ready-saddled at this present speaking in your own stable, and if you would condescend to mount and try his paces in the park, I think you must allow that you have seldom ridden a more gallant goer."

Sir Marmaduke was pleased with his own diplomacy. Casting his eyes on her ladyship's pretty feet, he had quite satisfied himself she was too lightly shod to accompany her husband through the moist luxuriant herbage of the park. The priest, too, being a Frenchman, would be safe to know little, and care less, about a horse. He could thus secure an uninterrupted interview with his friend, and might, possibly, make an advantageous sale into the bargain.

"Oh, go with him, George!" exclaimed Cerise, thinking to please her husband, who was, as she knew, still boy enough dearly to love a gallop.

"Go with him, and ride round by the end of my garden into the park. We can watch you from here. I do so like to see you on horseback!"

He laughed and assented, leaving her again alone with Florian. Always alone with Florian! He ground a curse between his teeth, as he strode off to the stable, and, trying Grey Plover's speed over the undulating surface of the home-park, took that animal in a grasp of iron that made it exert its utmost powers, in sheer astonishment.

Sir Marmaduke, scanning him from under a clump of trees, thought he had never seen his horse go so fast.

Once round the home-park—once across the lower end at speed—a leap over the ditch and bank—a breather up the hill—and Sir George trotted Grey Plover back to his owner, in an easy, self-satisfied manner that denoted the horse was sold. Never once had he turned his head towards the terrace where Cerise stood watching. She knew it as well as he did, but made excuses for him to herself. He was so fond of horses—he rode so beautifully—nobody could ride so well, unless his whole attention was fixed on his employment. But she sighed nevertheless, and Florian at her side, heard the sigh, and echoed it in his heart.

"Fifty broad pieces," said Sir George, drawing up to the owner's side, and sliding lightly to the ground.

"He's worth more than that," answered the other, loosening the horse's girths and turning his distended nostrils to the wind. "But we'll talk about the price afterwards. We are not likely to differ on that point. You never rode behind such shoulders, Sir George; and did you remark how he breasted the hill? Like a lion. Ah! if I was twenty years younger, or even ten! But it's no matter for that. I want your advice, Sir George. You carry a grey lining, as we say, to a green doublet. Give me the benefit. There's something brewing here between your house and mine that will come to hell-broth anon, if we take not some order with it in the meantime!"

The other turned his back resolutely on the terrace where his wife was standing, and shot a penetrating glance at the speaker.

"Let it brew!" said he. "If it's hot from the devil's cauldron, I think you and I can make shift to drink it out between us."

Sir Marmaduke laughed.

"I don't like the smell of it," he answered, "not to speak of the taste. Seriously, my friend, I've lit

on a nest of Jacobites, here, on your own property, at the 'Hamilton Arms!' They've got another of their cursed plots hatching in the chimney-corner, about fit to chip the shell by now. There's a couple of priests in it, of course; a lad, I know well enough, with a good bay mare, that has saved his neck in more ways than one, for a twelvemonth past. He's only put to the dirty work, you may be sure, and I can guess, though on this point I have no certain information, there are two or three more honest gentlemen, friends of yours and mine, whom I had rather meet at Otterdale Head with the hounds, than see badgered by an attorney-general at the Exchequer Bar or the Old Bailey, with as many witnesses arrayed against them, at half-a-guinea an oath, as would swear away the nine lives of a cat! A murrain of their plots! say I; there's neither pleasure nor profit in 'em, try 'em which side you will, and I've had *my* experience o' both!"

Sir George's brow went down, and his lips closed. In his frank, manly face, came the pitiless expression of a duellist who spies the weakness of his adversary's sword, and braces his muscles to dash in. He had got the Jesuit, he told himself, "on the hip!"

It was all over with the scheme, he felt. Ere such intelligence could have reached his thick-witted neighbour, he argued, it must be known in other and more dangerous quarters. If he had ever suffered the promised earldom to dazzle him for an instant, his eyes were opened now; that bit of parchment was but a patent for the gallows. He could hang the tempter who had offered it him, within a week! At this reflection the whole current of his passions turned—the man's nature was of the true conquering type—stern, fierce, almost savage, while confronted with his adversary; generous, forbearing, even tender, when the foe was at his feet.

The noblest instincts of chivalry were at work within his bosom, they found expression in the simple energy with which he inwardly ejaculated, "No! D—n it! I'll fight fair!"

"My advice," said he, quietly, "is easily followed. Do nothing in a hurry—this country is not like France; these cancers often die out of themselves, because the whole body is healthy and full of life, but, for that very reason, if you eradicate them with the knife your loss of blood is more injurious than the sore itself. Get all the information you can, Sir Marmaduke, and when the time arrives,

act with your usual vigour and good sense. Come! Fifty pieces for the grey horse? my man shall fetch him from Brentwood to-morrow."

Sir Marmaduke was well pleased. He flattered himself that he had fulfilled his delicate mission with extraordinary dexterity, and sold Grey Plover very fairly, besides. His friends were warned now, and if they chose to persist in thrusting their heads through a halter, why he could do no more. He was satisfied, Sir George had taken the hint he meant to offer. Very likely the conspiracy would come to nothing after all, but, at any rate, it was time to hang Captain Bold. He must see about it that afternoon, so he would take his leave at once, and return to Brentwood by the way he came.

Conscious of the disadvantage under which he laboured for want of the red waistcoat, Sir Marmaduke sturdily refused his host's hospitable offer of refreshment, and was steering Grey Plover through the oaks at the end of the avenue, by the time George had rejoined his wife and Florian on the terrace. Walking back, the latter smiled and shook his head. He was thinking, perhaps, how his neighbour's loyalty was leavened with a strong disinclination to exertion, and no little indulgence for those whose political opinions differed from his own.

But the smile clouded over as he approached the terrace. Together again—always together! and in such earnest conversation. He could see his wife's white hands waving with the pretty trick of gesticulation he loved so dearly. What could they have to say? what could *she* have to say that demanded so much energy? If he might only have heard. She was talking about himself; praising his horsemanship, his strength, his courage, his manly character, in the fond, deprecatory way that a woman affects when speaking of the man she loves. Every word the sweet lips uttered made Florian wince and quiver, yet her husband, striding heavily up the terrace-steps, almost wished that he could change places with the Jesuit priest.

The latter left her side when Sir George approached; and Cerise, who was conscious of something in her husband's manner that wounded her feelings and jarred upon her pride, assumed a colder air and a reserved bearing, not the least natural to her character, but of late becoming habitual. Everything conspired to increase the distance between two hearts that ought to have been knit together by bonds no misunderstanding nor want of confidence should ever have been able to divide.

Sir George, watching his wife closely, addressed himself to Florian:

"Bad news!" said he, whereat she started and changed colour. "But not so bad as it might have been. The hounds are on the scent, my friend; I told you I expected it long ago, and if the fox breaks covert now, as Sir Marmaduke would say, they will run into him as sure as fate. Halloa, man! what ails you? You never used to hoist the white ensign thus, when we cleared for action!"

The Jesuit's discomposure was so obvious as to justify his host's astonishment. Florian felt, indeed, like a man who, having known an earthquake was coming, and wilfully kept it out of his mind, sees the earth at last sliding from beneath his feet. His face grew livid, and the drops stood on his brow. In proportion to his paleness, Lady Hamilton's colour rose. Sir George looked from one to the other with a curling lip.

"There is no occasion for all this alarm," he observed, rather contemptuously. "The fox can lie at earth till the worst danger of the chase is over. Perhaps his safest refuge is the very hen-roost he has skulked in to rob! Cheer up, Florian," he added, in a kinder tone. "You don't suppose I would give up a comrade so long as the old house

can cover him! I must only make you a prisoner, that is all, with my lady, here, for your gaoler. Keep close for a week or two, and the fiercest of the storm will have blown over. It will be time enough then to smuggle you back to St. Omer, or wherever you have to furnish your report. Don't be afraid, man. Why, you used to be made of sterner stuff than this!"

Florian could not answer. A host of conflicting feelings filled his breast to suffocation, but at that moment how cheerfully, how gladly, would he have laid down his life for the husband of the woman he so madly loved! Covering his face in his hands he sobbed aloud.

Cerise raised her eyes with a look of enthusiastic approval; but they sank terrified and disheartened by the hard, inscrutable expression of Sir George's countenance. Her gratitude, he thought, was only for the preservation of Florian. They might congratulate each other when his back was turned, on the strange infatuation that befriended them, and perhaps laugh at his blind stupidity; but he would fight fair. Yes, however hard it seemed, he was a gentleman, and he would fight fair!

CHAPTER XIII.

FAIR FIGHTING.

SO the duel began. The moral battle that a man wages with his own temper, his own passions, words, actions, his very thoughts, and a few days of the uncongenial struggle seemed to have added years to Sir George's life. Of all the trials that could have been imposed on one of his nature, this was, perhaps, the severest, to live day by day, and hour by hour, on terms of covert enmity with the woman best loved—the friend most frankly trusted in the world. Two of the chief props that uphold the social fabric, seemed cut away from under him. Outward sorrows, injuries, vexations can be borne cheerfully enough while domestic happiness remains, and the heart is at peace within. They do but beat

outside, like the blast of a storm on a house well warmed and water-tight. Neither can the utmost perfidy of woman utterly demoralize him who owns some staunch friend to trust, on whose vigorous nature he can lean, in whose manly counsel he can take comfort, till the sharp anguish has passed away. But when love and friendship fail both at once, there is great danger of a moral recklessness which affirms, and would fain believe, that no truth is left in the world. This is the worst struggle of all. Conduct and character flounder in it hopelessly, because it affords no foothold whence to make an upward spring, so that they are apt to sink and disappear without even a struggle for extrication.

Sir George had indeed a purpose to preserve him from complete demoralization, but that purpose was in itself antagonistic to every impulse and instinct of his nature. It did violence to his better feelings, his education, his principles, his very prejudices and habits, but he pursued it consistently nevertheless, whilst it poisoned every hour of his life. He went about his daily avocations as usual. He never thought of discontinuing those athletic exercises and field sports which were elevated into an actual business by men of his station at that period, but except

for a few thrilling moments at long intervals, the zest seemed to be gone from them all.

He flung his hawks aloft on the free open moor, and cursed them bitterly when they failed to strike. He cheered his hounds in the deep wild dales through which they tracked their game so busily, and hurried Emerald or Grey Plover along at the utmost speed those generous animals could compass, but it was with a grim sullen determination to succeed, rather than with the hearty jovial enthusiasm that naturally accompanies the chase. Hawks, hounds, and horses, were neither cordials nor stimulants now. Only anodynes, and scarcely efficacious as such for more than a few minutes at a time.

It had been settled that for a short period, depending on the alarm felt by the country at the proposed rising, and consequent strictness of search for suspected characters, Florian should remain domiciled as before at Hamilton Hill. It was only stipulated that he should not show himself abroad by daylight, nor hold open communication with such of his confederates as might be prowling about the "Hamilton Arms." With Sir Marmaduke's good will, and the general laxity of justice prevailing in the district, he seemed to incur far less peril by

hiding in his present quarters, than by travelling southward even in disguise on his way to the coast.

There were plenty more of his cloth little distinguished, by the authorities indeed, from non-juring clergymen of the Church of England, who remained quietly unnoticed, on sufferance as it were, in the northern counties. Even if watched, Florian might pass for one of these, so his daily life went on much as before Sir Marmaduke's visit. He did not write perhaps so many letters, for his correspondence with the continent had been discontinued, but this increase of leisure only gave him more time for Lady Hamilton's society, and as he could not accompany her husband to the moor, for fear of being seen, he now spent every day till dinner-time under the same roof with Cerise.

Sir George used to wonder sometimes in his own heavy heart what they could find to talk about through all those hours that seemed so long to him in the saddle amongst the dales—the dales he had loved so dearly a few short weeks ago, that seemed so wearisome, so gloomy, and so endless now—wondered what charm his wife could discover in this young priest's society; in which of the qualities, he himself wanted, lay the subtle influence that so entwined her when Florian first arrived, that had

changed her manner and depressed her spirits of late since they had been more thrown together, and caused her to look so unhappy now, that they were soon to part. Stronger and stronger, struggle as he might, grew a horrible conviction that she loved the visitor in her heart. Like a gallant swimmer, beating against the tide, he strove not to give way, battling inch by inch, gaining less with every effort—stationary—receding—till, losing head and heart alike, and wheeling madly with the current, he struck out in sheer despair for the quicksands, instinctively preferring to meet rather than to await destruction.

Abroad all the morning from daybreak, forcing himself to leave the house lest he should be unable to resist the temptation of watching her, Sir George gave Cerise ample opportunities to indulge in Florian's society, had she been so inclined. He thought she availed herself of them to the utmost, he thought that while he was chafing and fretting, and eating his own heart far away on those bleak moors, Lady Hamilton, passing gracefully amongst her rose-trees on the terrace, or sitting at ease in her pretty boudoir, appreciated the long release from his company, and made the most of it with her guest. He could fancy he saw the pretty head

droop, the soft cheek flush, the white hands wave. He knew all her ways so well. But not for him now. Not for *him!*

Then Grey Plover would wince and swerve aside, scared by the fierce energy of that half-spoken oath, or Emerald would plunge wildly forward, maddened by the unaccustomed spur, the light grasp bearing suddenly so hard upon the rein. But neither Emerald nor Grey Plover, mettled hunters both, could afford more than a temporary palliative to the goad that pricked their rider's heart.

Sir George had better have been *more* or *less* suspicious. Had he chosen to lower himself in his own eyes by ascertaining how Lady Hamilton spent her mornings, he would have discovered that she employed herself in filling voluminous sheets with her neat illegible French hand, writing in her boudoir, where she sat *alone*. Very unhappy poor Cerise was, though she scorned to complain. Very pale she grew and languid, going through her housekeeping duties with an effort, and ceasing altogether from the carolling of those French ballads in which the Yorkshire servants took an incomprehensible delight.

She seemed, worst sign of all, to have no heart even for her flowers now, and did not visit the

terrace for five days on a stretch. The very first time she went there, George happened to spend the morning at home.

From the window of his room he could see one end of the terrace with some difficulty, and a good deal of inconvenience to his neck; nevertheless, catching a glimpse of his wife's figure as she moved about amongst her rose-trees, he could not resist watching it for a while, neither suspiciously nor in anger, but with something of the dull aching tenderness that looks its last on the dead face a man has loved best on earth. It is, and it is *not*. The remnant left serves only to prove how much is lost, and that which makes his deepest sorrow affords his sole consolation—to feel that love remains while the loved one is for ever gone.

Half a dozen times he rose from his occupation. It was but refitting some tackle on the model brigantine, yet it connected itself, like everything else, with *her*. Half a dozen times he sat down again with a crick in his neck, and an inward curse on his own folly, but he went back once more just the same. Then he resumed his work, smiling grimly while his brown face paled, for Monsieur de St. Croix had just made his appearance on the terrace.

"As usual, I suppose," muttered Sir George,

waxing an inch or two of twine with the nicest care, and fitting it into a block the size of a silver penny. But somehow he could not succeed in his manipulation; he was inventing a self-reefing topsail, but he couldn't get the fore haulyards taut enough, and do what he would the jack-stay came foul of the yard. "As usual!" he repeated more bitterly. "Easy it is! He's the best helmsman who knows when to let the ship steer herself!" Then he applied once more to his task, whistling an old French quickstep somewhat out of time.

Florian had been watching his opportunity, and took advantage of it at once. He, too, had suffered severely during the past few days. Perhaps, in truth, his greatest torture was to have been deprived of Lady Hamilton's society. He fancied she avoided him, though in this he was wrong, for lately she had hardly given him a thought, except of friendly pity for his lot. Had it been otherwise, Cerise would have taken care to allow no such interviews as the present, because she would have suspected their danger. Young, frank, and as little of a coquette as it was possible for her mother's daughter to be, she had never yet even thought of analyzing her feelings towards Florian.

And he, too, was probably fool enough to shrink

from the idea of her shunning him, forgetting (as men always do forget, the fundamental principles of gallantry in regard to the woman they really love) that such a mistrust would have been a step, and a long one, towards the interest he could not but feel anxious to inspire.

Had she been more experienced or less preoccupied, she must have learned the truth from his changing colour, his faltering step, his awkward address, to all others so quiet, graceful, and polite. She was thinking of George, she was low-spirited, and unhappy. Florian's society was a change and a distraction. She welcomed hi with a kind greeting and a bewitching smile.

The more anxious men are to broach an interesting subject, the more surely do they approach it by a circuitous route. Florian asked half a dozen questions concerning the budding, grafting, and production of roses in general, before he dared approach the topic nearest his heart. Cerise answered good-humouredly, and became more cheerful under the influence of fresh air, a gleam of sun, and the scent of her favourite flowers.

Bending sedulously over an especial treasure, she did not remark how long a silence was preserved by her companion, though rising she could not fail to

observe the agitation of his looks, nor the shaking hands with which he strove to assist her in a task already done.

"These are very late roses," said he, in a tone strangely earnest for the enunciation of so simple a remark. "There are still half a dozen more buds to blow, and winter has already arrived."

"That's why I am so fond of them," she replied. "Winter comes too early both in the garden and in the house. I like to keep my flowers as long as I can, and my illusions too."

She sighed while she spoke, and Florian, looking enderly in her face, noticed its air of languor and despondency. A wild, mad hope shot through his heart, and coming close to her side, he resumed:

"It will be a week at least before this green bud blows, and in a week, Lady Hamilton, I shall be gone."

"So soon?" she said, in a low, tender voice, modulated to sadness by thoughts of her own in no way connected with his approaching departure. "I had hoped you would stay with us the whole winter, Monsieur de St. Croix. We shall miss you dreadfully."

"I shall be gone," he repeated, mournfully, "and a man in my position can less control his own move-

ments than a wisp of sea-weed on the wave. In a day or two, perhaps in a few hours, I must wish you good-bye, and—and—it is more than probable that I shall never see you again."

Clasping her hands, she looked at him with her blue eyes wide open, like a child who is half-grieved, half-frightened, to see its plaything broken, yet not entirely devoid of curiosity to know what there is inside. Like a flash came back to him the white walls, the drooping laburnums, the trellised beech-walk in the Convent Garden, and before him stood Mademoiselle de Montmirail, the Cerise of the old wild, hopeless days, whom he ought never to have loved, whom least of all should he dare to think of now.

"Do you remember our Lady of Succour?" said he; "do you remember the pleasant spring-time, the smiling fields, and the sunny skies of our own Normandy? How different from these grey, dismal hills! And do you remember the day you told me your mother had recalled you to Paris? You cannot have forgotten it! Lady Hamilton, everything else is changed, but I alone remain the same."

The broken voice, the trembling gestures betrayed deep and uncontrollable emotion. Even Cerise could not but feel that this man was strangely

affected by her presence, that his self-command was every moment forsaking him, and that already words might be hovering on his lips to which she must not listen. Perhaps, too, there was some little curiosity to hear what those words could be—some half-scornful reflection that when spoken it would be time enough to disapprove—some petulant triumph to think that everybody was not distant, reserved, impenetrable, like Sir George.

"And who wishes you to change?" said she, softly. "Not I for one."

"I shall remember those words when I am far away," he answered, passionately. "Remember them! I shall think of them day by day, and hour by hour, long after you have forgotten there was ever such a person in existence as Florian de St. Croix. Your director, your worshipper. Cerise! your slave!"

She turned on him angrily. All her dignity was aroused by such an appeal in such a tone, made to *her*, a wedded wife, but her indignation, natural as it was, changed to pity when she marked his pale, worn face, his imploring looks, his complete prostration, as it seemed, both of mind and body. It was no fault of hers, yet was it the wreck she herself had made. Angry! No, she could not be angry,

when she thought of all he must have suffered, and for *her;* when she remembered how this man had never so much as asked for a kind word in exchange for the sacrifice of his soul.

The tears stood in her eyes, and when she spoke again her voice was very low and pitiful.

"Florian," said she, "listen to me. If not for your own sake, at least for mine, forbear to speak words that can never be unsaid. You have been to me, I hope and believe, the truest friend man ever was to woman. Do you think I have forgotten the white chapel above Port Welcome, or the bright morning that made me a happy wife?" Her face clouded, but she resumed in a more composed tone: "We have all our own burdens to bear, our own trials to get through. It is not for *me* to teach *you* that this world is no place of unchequered sunshine. You are right. I shall, perhaps, never see you again. Nay, it is far better so. But let me always remember you hereafter as the Florian de St. Croix, on whose truth, and unselfishness, and right feeling Cerise Hamilton could rely, even if the whole world besides should fail, and turn against her at her need!"

He was completely unmanned. Her feminine instinct had taught her to use the only weapon

against which he was powerless, and she conquered, as a woman always does conquer, when madly loved by him who has excited her interest, her pity, and her vanity, but who has failed to touch her heart.

"And you *will* remember me? Promise that!" was all he could answer. "It is enough; it is my reward. What happiness have I, but to obey your lightest wish?"

"You go to France?" she asked, cheerfully, opining with some discretion that it would be wel to turn the conversation as soon as possible into a less compromising channel. "You will see the Marquise? You will be near her, at any rate? Will you charge yourself with a packet I have been preparing for days, hoping it would be conveyed to my dear mother by no hand but yours?"

It was a masterly stroke enough. It not only changed the whole conversation, but gave Cerise an opportunity of escaping into the house, and breaking up the interview.

He bowed assent of course. He would have bowed assent had she bid him shed his own blood then and there on the gravel-walk at her feet; but when she left him to fetch her packet, he waited for her return with the open mouth and fixed gaze of one

who has been vouchsafed a vision from another world, and looks to see it just once again before he dies.

The rigging of the brigantine proceeded but slowly. Sir George could not apply himself to his task for five minutes at a time; and had the tackle of the real "Bashful Maid" ever become so hopelessly fouled and tangled as her model's, she must have capsized with the first breeze that filled her sails. His right hand had forgotten its cunning, and his very head seemed so utterly confused that, to use his own professional metaphor, "he didn't know truck from taffrail; the main-brace from the captain's quadrant."

What a lengthened interview was held by those two on the terrace! Again and again rising and dislocating his neck to look—there they were still! In the same place, in the same attitude, the same earnest conversation! What subject could there be but one to bear all this discussion from two young people like these? So much at least he had learned *en mousquetaire*, but it is difficult to look at such matters *en mousquetaire*, when they affect oneself. Ha! She is gone at last. And he, why does he stand there watching like an idiot? Sir George turned once more to the brigantine, and her dolphin-striker snapped short off between his fingers.

Again to the window. Florian not gone yet! And with reason, too, as it seems; for Lady Hamilton returns, and places a packet in his hand. He kisses hers as he bends over it, and hides the packet carefully away in his breast. Zounds! This is too much. But Sir George will command himself. Yes, he will command himself from respect to his own character, if for nothing else.

So with an affectation of carelessness, so marked as to be utterly transparent, the baronet walked down to the garden-door, where he could not fail to meet his wife as she re-entered the house for a second time, leaving Florian without. It added little to his peace of mind that her manner was flurried, and traces of recent tears were on her face.

"Cerise," said he, and she looked up smiling; "I beg your pardon, Lady Hamilton, may I ask what was that packet you brought out even now, and delivered to Monsieur de St. Croix?"

She flashed at him a glance of indignant reproach, not, as he believed, to reprove his curiosity, but because he had checked himself in calling her by the name he loved.

"They are letters for Madame le Marquise, Sir George," she answered, coldly; and, without turning her head, walked haughtily past him into the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

"WHAT a sky! what weather! what a look-out! what an apartment! and what chocolate!" exclaimed Madame de Montmirail to her maid, in an accent of intense Parisian disgust; while the latter prepared her mistress to go abroad and encounter in the streets of London the atmosphere of a really tolerably fine day for England at the time of year. "Quick, Justine! do not distress yourself about costume. My visits this morning are of business rather than ceremony. And what matters it now? Yet, after all, I suppose a woman never likes to look her worst, especially when she is growing old."

Justine made no answer. The ready disclaimer which would indeed have been no flattery died upon

her lips; for Justine also felt aggrieved in many ways by this untoward expedition to the English capital. In the first place, having spent but one night in Paris, she had been compelled to leave it at the very period when its attractions were coming into bloom: in the next, she had encountered, while crossing the channel such a fresh breeze, as she was pleased to term, "*un vent de Polichinelle!*" and which upset her digestive process for a week: in the third, though disdaining to occupy a hostile territory with her war material disorganized, she was painfully conscious of looking her worst; while, lastly, she had no opportunity for resetting the blunted edge of her attractions, because in the whole household below-stairs could be discovered but one of the opposite sex, sixty years old, and obviously given, body and soul, to that mistress who cheers while she inebriates.

So Justine bustled about discontentedly, and her expressive French face, usually so pleasant and lively, now looked dull, and bilious, and cross.

She brightened up a little, nevertheless, when a chair stopped at the door, and a visitor was announced. The street, though off the Strand, then a fashionable locality, was yet tolerably quiet and retired.

It cheered Justine's spirits to bring up a gentleman's name for admission; and she almost recovered her good-humour when she learned he was a countryman of her own.

The Marquise, sipping chocolate and dressed to go out, received her visitor more than cordially. She had been restless at Chateau-la-Fierté, restless in Paris, restless through her whole journey, and was now restless in London. But restlessness is borne the easier when we have some one to share it with; and this young man had reason to be gratified with the welcome accorded him by so celebrated a beauty as Madame de Montmirail.

She might almost have been his mother, it is true; but all his life he had accustomed himself to think of her as the brilliant Marquise with whom everybody of any pretence to distinction was avowedly in love, and without looking much at her face, or affecting her society, he accepted the situation too. What would you have? It was *de rigueur*. He declared himself her adorer just as he wore a Steinkirk cravat and took snuff, though he hated it, from a diamond snuff-box.

The Marquise could not help people making fools of themselves, she said; and perhaps did not wish to help it. She too had dreamed her dream, and all

was over. The sovereignty of beauty can at no time be disagreeable, least of all when the bloom begins to fade, and the empire grows day by day more precarious. If young Chateau-Guerrand chose to be as absurd as his uncle, let him singe his wings, or his wig, or any part of his attire he pleased. She was not going to put her lamp out because the cockchafer is a blunderer, and the moth a suicide.

He was a good-looking young gentleman enough, and in Justine's opinion seemed only the more attractive from the air of thorough coxcombry with which his whole deportment, person, and conversation were imbued. He had quarrelled with his uncle, the Prince-Marshal on the score of that relative's undutiful conduct. The veteran had paid the young soldier's debts twice, and lo! the third time he remonstrated. His nephew, under pretext of an old wound disabling the sword-arm, obtained permission to retire from the army, thinking thus to annoy his uncle, and accepted an appointment as *attaché* to the French embassy at the Court of St. James, for which he was specially unfitted both by nature and education.

"You arrived, madame, but yesterday," said he bowing over the hand extended to him, with an affectation of extreme devotion. "I learned it this

morning, and behold I fly here on the instant, to place myself, my chief, and all the resources of my country, at the disposition of madame."

"Of course," she answered, smiling. "But in the meantime, understand me, I neither want yourself, however charming, nor your chief, however discreet, nor the resources of your country and mine, however powerful. I am here on private affairs, and till they are concluded I shall have no leisure to enter society. What I ask of your devotion now, is to sit down in that chair, and tell me the news, while I finish my chocolate in peace."

He obeyed, delighted; evidently, she was rejoiced to meet him here, so unexpectedly, and could not conceal her gratification. He was treated like an intimate friend, an established favourite—Justine had retired. The Marquise loitered over her chocolate. She looked well, wonderfully handsome for her age, and she had never appeared so kind, "Ah, rogue!" thought this enviable youth, apostrophizing the person he most admired in the world, "must it always be so? mothers and daughters, maids, wives and widows. No escape, *parbleu*, and no mercy. What is it about you, my boy, that thus prostrates every creature in a petticoat

before the feet of Casimir de Chateau-Guerrand? Is it looks, is it manners, is it intellect? Faith, I think it must be a happy mixture of them all!"

"Well!" said the Marquise, with one of her victorious glances, "I am not very patient, you know that of old. Quick! out with the news, you who have the knack of telling it so well."

He glanced in an opposite mirror, and looked as fascinating as he could.

"It goes no further, madame, of course; and indeed I would trust you with my head, as I have long since trusted you with my heart." An impatient gesture of his listener, somewhat discomfited him, but he proceeded nevertheless, in a tone of ineffable self-satisfaction.

"We are behind the scenes, you know, we diplomatists, and see the players before the wigs are adjusted or the paint laid on. Such actors! madame, and oh, such actresses! The old Court is a comedy to which no one pays attention—the young Court is a farce played with a tragic solemnity. Even Mrs. Bellenden has thrown up her part. There is no gooseberry-bush now behind which the Heir-apparent fills his basket. Some say that none is necessary, but Mrs. Howard still dresses the Princess, and——"

"Spare me your green-room scandal," interrupted the Marquise. "Surely I have heard enough of it in my time. At Fontainebleau, at Versailles, at Marly. I am sick to death of all the gossips and slanders that gallop up and down the backstairs of a palace. Talk politics to me, for heaven's sake, or don't talk at all!"

"I know not what you call politics, madame," answered the unabashed attaché, "if the Prince's likings and vagaries are not to be included in the term. What say you to a plot, a conspiracy, more, a Jacobite rising? In the north of course! that established stronghold of legitimacy. Do I interest you now?"

He did indeed, and though she strove hard not to betray her feelings, no observer, less preoccupied with the reflection of his own beloved image in the looking-glass, could have failed to remark the gleam of her dark eyes, her rising colour, and quick-drawn breath. Though she recovered herself with habitual self-command, there was still a slight tremor in her voice, while she repeated as unconcernedly as she could.

"In the north you say? Ah! it is a long distance from the capital. Your department is very likely misinformed, or has itself dressed up a goblin

to frighten idle children like yourself, monsieur, into paying more attention to their lessons."

But Casimir, who laid great stress on his own diplomatic importance, vehemently repudiated such an assumption.

"Goblin, indeed!" he replied, indignantly. "It is a goblin that will be found to have body and bones, and blood too, I fear, unless I am much misinformed and mistaken. We have nothing to do with it of course, but I can tell you, madame, that we have information of the time, the locality, the numbers, the persons implicated. I believe if you put me to it, I could even furnish you with the names of the accused."

She bowed carelessly. "A few graziers, I suppose, and cattle-drivers," she observed, "with a Scottish housebreaker, and a drunken squire or two for leaders. It is scarcely worth the trouble to ask any more questions."

"Far graver than that, madame," he answered, determined not to be put down. "Some of the best names in the north, as I am informed, are already compromised beyond power to retreat. I could tell them over from memory, but my tongue fails to pronounce the barbarous syllables. Would you like to have them in black and white?"

"Not this morning, monsieur," she answered, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Do you think I came to London in order to mix myself up in an unsuccessful rebellion? I, who have private affairs of my own that require all my attention. You might as well suppose I had followed yourself across the Channel because I could not exist apart from Casimir de Chateau-Guerrand! Frankly, I am glad to see you too. Very glad," she added, stretching her white hand to the young man with another of her bewitching smiles. "But I must hunt you away now. Positively I must; I ought to have sold an estate, and touched the purchase-money by this time. I am a thorough woman of business, monsieur, I would have you know; which does not prevent my loving amusement at the right season, like other people."

He took his hat to depart, feeling, perhaps for the first time, that there were women in the world to whom even he dared not aspire, and that it was provoking such should be the best worth winning. The Marquise had not yet lost the knack of playing a game from which she had never risen a loser but once, and indeed if her weapons were a little less bright, her skill of fence was better than ever. Few women have thoroughly learned the art of

man-taming till they are past their prime, and even then, perhaps the influence that subdued his fellows, is powerless alone on him whom most they wish to capture.

Admiration from young Chateau-Guerrand gratified the Marquise as some stray woodcock in a bag of a hundred head gratifies a sportsman. It hardly even stimulated her vanity. She wanted him though, like the woodcock, for ulterior purposes, and shot him therefore, so to speak, gracefully, neatly, and in proper form.

"I should fear to commit an indiscretion by remaining one moment longer, madame," said he; "but—but——" and he looked longingly, though with less than his accustomed assurance, in the beautiful eyes that met his own so kindly. "But—but," she interposed, laughing, "you may come again to-morrow at the same time; I shall be alone. And, Casimir, I have some talent for curiosity, bring with you that list you spoke of—at least if no one else has seen it. A scandal, you know, is like a rose, if I may not gather it fresh from the stalk, I had rather not wear it at all!"

"Honour!" said he, kissing the hand she extended to him, and in high glee tripped down-stairs to regain his chair in the street.

Satisfied with the implied promise, Madame de Montmirail looked wistfully at a clock on the chimney-piece and pondered.

"Twenty-four hours gained on that young man's gossiping tongue at least. To-morrow night I might be there—the horses are good in this country. I have it! When I near the place I must make use of their Diligence. I shall overtake more than one. I cannot appear too quickly. I shall have a famous laugh at Malletort, to be sure, if my information is earlier than his—and at any rate, I shall embrace my darling Cerise, and see her husband—my son-in-law now—my son-in-law! How strange it seems! Well, business first and pleasure afterwards."

"Justine!"

"Madame!" replied Justine, re-entering with a colour in her cheek and a few particles of soot, such as constitute an essential part of a London atmosphere, on her dainty forehead, denoting that she had been leaning out at window to look down the street.

"Madame called, I think. Can I do anything more for madame before she goes out?"

Much to Justine's astonishment, she was directed to pack certain articles of wearing apparel without delay.

These were to be ready in two hours' time. Was madame going again to voyage? That was no business of Justine's. Was Pierre not to accompany madame? nor Alphonse? nor even old Busson? If any of these were wanted, madame would herself let them know. And when was madame coming back? Shortly; Justine should learn in a day or two. So, without further parley, madame entered her chair and proceeded to that business which she imagined was the sole cause of her journey to London.

After some hesitation, and a few tiresome interviews with her intendant, the Marquise had lately decided on selling her estates in the West Indies, stipulating only, for the sake of Célandine, that Bartoletti should be retained as overseer at *Cash-à-crou*. The locality, indeed, had but few agreeable associations connected with it. Months of wearisome exile, concluded by a night of bloodshed and horror, had not endeared Montmirail West in the eyes of its European owner.

It is not now necessary to state that Madame de Montmirail was a lady of considerable enterprise, and especially affected all matters connected with business or speculation. In an hour she made up her mind that London was the best market for her

property, and in twenty-four she was in her carriage, on the road to England. Much to her intendant's admiration, she also expressed her decided intention of managing the whole negotiations herself. The quiet old Frenchman gratefully appreciated an independence of spirit that saved him long journeys, heavy responsibilities, and one or two of his mistress's sharpest rebukes.

To effect her sale, the preliminaries of which had been already arranged by letter, the Marquise had to proceed as far as St. Margaret's Hill in the borough of Southwark. Her chairmen, after so long a trot, felt themselves doubtless entitled to refreshment, and took advantage of her protracted interview with the broker whom she visited, to adjourn to a neighbouring tavern for the purpose of recruiting their strength. The beer was so good that, returning past the old Admiralty Office, her leading bearer was compelled to sit down between the poles of his chair, taking off his hat, and proceeding to wipe his brows in a manner extremely ludicrous to the bystanders, and equally provoking to the inmate who desired to be carried home. His yokefellow, instead of reproving him, burst into a drunken laugh, and the Marquise inside, though half-amused, was yet at the same time pro-

voked to find herself placed in a thoroughly false position by so absurd a casualty.

She let down the window and expostulated, but with no result, except to collect a crowd who expressed their sympathy with the usual good taste and kind feeling of a metropolitan mob. Madame de Montmirail's appearance denoted she was a highborn lady, and her accent proclaimed her a foreigner. The combination was irresistible; presently, coarse jests and brutal laughter rose to hootings of derision, accompanied by ominous cries—"Down with the Pretender! No Popery! Who heated the warming-pan?" and such catch-words of political rancour and ill-will.

Ere long an apple or two began to fly, then a rotten egg, and the body of a dead cat, followed by a brickbat, while the less drunken chairman had his hat knocked over his eyes. That which began in horse-play was fast growing to a riot, and the Marquise might have found herself roughly handled if it had not been for an irruption of seamen from a neighbouring tavern, who were wiling away their time by drinking strong liquors during the examination of their papers at the Admiralty Office, adjoining. Though not above half a dozen in number, they were soon "alongside the wreck," as they

called it, making a lane through the crowd by the summary process of knocking down everybody who opposed them, but before they had time to give "three cheers for the lady," their leader, a sedate and weather-worn tar who had never abandoned his pipe during the heat of the action, dropped it short from between his lips, and stood aghast before the chair window, rolling his hat in his hands, speechless and spell-bound with amazement.

The Marquise recognised him at once.

"It is Smoke Jack! and welcome!" she exclaimed. "I should know you amongst a thousand! Indeed, I scarcely wanted your assistance more the night you saved us at *Cash-à-crou.* Ah! I have not forgotten the men of 'The Bashful Maid,' nor how to speak to them. *Come, bear a hand, my hearty!* Is it not so?"

The little nautical slang spoken in her broken English, acted like a charm. Not a man but would have fought for her to the death, or drank her health till all was blue!

They cheered lustily now, they crowded round in enthusiastic admiration, and the youngest of the party, with a forethought beyond all praise, rushed back to the tavern he had quitted, for a jorum of

hot punch, in case the lady should feel faint after her accident.

Smoke Jack's stoicism was for once put to flight.

"Say the word, marm!" exclaimed the old seaman, "and we'll pull the street down. Who began it?" he added, looking round and doubling his great brown fists. "Who began it—that's all I want to know. Ain't nobody to be started for this here game? Ain't nobody to get his allowance? I'll give it him, hot and hot!"

With difficulty Smoke Jack was persuaded that no benefit would accrue to the Marquise from his doing immediate battle with the bystanders, consisting by this time of a few women and street-urchins, for most of the able-bodied rioters had slunk away before the threatening faces of the seamen. He had to content himself, therefore, with administering sundry kicks and cuffs to the chairmen, both of whom were too drunk to proceed, and with carrying the Marquise home, in person, assisted by a certain elderly boatswain's-mate, on whom he seemed to place some reliance, while the rest of the sailors sought their favourite resort once more, to drink success and a pleasant voyage to the lady, in the money with which she had liberally rewarded them.

"It is droll!" thought Madame de Montmirail, as she felt the chair jerk and sway to the unaccustomed action of its maritime bearers. "Droll enough to be thus carried through the streets of London by the British navy! and droller than all, that I should have met Smoke Jack at a time like the present. This accident may prove extremely useful in the end. Doubtless, he is still devoted to his old captain. Everybody seems devoted to that man. Can I wonder at my little Cerise? And Sir George may be none the worse of a faithful follower in days like these. I will ask him, at any rate, and it is not often when I ask anything that I am refused!"

So when the chair halted at last before Madame de Montmirail's door, she dismissed the boatswain's-mate delighted, with many kind words and a couple of broad pieces, while Smoke Jack, no less delighted, found himself ushered into the sitting-room upstairs, even before he had time to look round and take his bearings.

The Marquise prided herself on knowledge of mankind, and offered him refreshment on the spot.

"Will you have grog?" she said. "It is bad for you sailors to talk with the mouth dry."

Smoke Jack, again, prided himself on his manners, and declined strenuously. Neither would he be prevailed upon to sit down, but balanced his person on either leg alternately, holding his hat with both hands before the pit of his stomach.

"Smoke Jack," said the Marquise, "I know you of old; brave, discreet, and trustworthy. I am bound on a journey in which there is some little danger, and much necessity for caution; have you the time and the inclination to accompany me?"

His impulse was to follow her to the end of the world, but he mistrusted these sirens precisely because it *was* always his impulse so to follow them.

"Is it for a spell, marm?" he asked; "or for a long cruise? If I might make so free, marm, I'd like to be told the name of the skipper and the tonnage of the craft!"

"I start in an hour for the north," she continued, neither understanding nor heeding his proviso. "I am going into the neighbourhood of your old captain, Sir George Hamilton."

"Captain George!" exclaimed the seaman, with difficulty restraining himself from shying his hat to the ceiling, and looking sheepishly conscious, he had almost committed this tempting solecism.

"What! *our* Captain George? I'm not much of a talking chap, marm; I haven't got the time, but if that's the port you're bound for, I'll sail round the world with you, if we beat against a headwind the whole voyage through!"

With such sentiments the preliminaries were easily adjusted, and it was arranged that Smoke Jack should accompany the Marquise on her journey with no more delay than would be required to purchase him landsman's attire. He entered into the scheme with thorough goodwill, though expressing, and doubtless feeling, some little disappointment when he learned that Justine, of whom he had caught a glimpse on the stairs, was not to be of the party.

Avowedly a woman-hater, he had, of course, a *real* weakness for the softer sex, and with all his deference to the Marquise, would have found much delight in the society of her waiting-maid. Such specimens as Justine he considered his especial study, and believed that of all men he best understood their qualities, and was most conversant with "the trim on 'em."

CHAPTER XV.

FOREWARNED.

IT is needless to follow Madame de Montmirail and her new retainer through the different stages of their journey to the north. By dint of liberal pay, with some nautical eloquence on the part of Smoke Jack, who, being a man of few words, spoke those few to the purpose, they overtook the "Flying-Post" coach by noon of the second day at a town some fifteen miles south of Hamilton Hill. Calculating to arrive before nightfall, they here transferred themselves and their luggage to that lumbering conveyance; and if the Marquise wished to avoid notice, such a measure was prudent enough. In the masked lady closely wrapped up and silent, who sat preoccupied inside, no one could suspect the brilliant and sumptuous

Frenchwoman, the beauty of two consecutive Courts. Nor, so long as he kept his mouth shut, did Smoke Jack's seafaring character show through his shore-going disguise, consisting of jack-boots, three-cornered hat, scratch-wig, and long grey duffle greatcoat, in which he might have passed for a Quaker, but that the butt-end of a pistol peeped out of its side-pockets on each side.

Their fellow-passengers found their curiosity completely baffled by the haughty taciturnity of the one, and the surly answers of the other. Even the ascent of Otterdale Scaur failed to elicit anything, although the rest of the freight alighted to walk up that steep and dangerous incline. In vain the ponderous coach creaked, and strained, and laboured; in vain driver flogged and guard expostulated, the lady inside was asleep, and must not be disturbed. Smoke Jack on the roof, swore that he had paid his passage, and would stick to the ship while a plank held. It was impossible to make anything satisfactory out of this strangely-assorted couple, and the task was abandoned in despair long before the weary stretch of road had been traversed, that led northward over the brown moorland, past the door of the "Hamilton Arms."

The lady was tired—the lady would alight.

Though their places were taken for several miles further, she and her domestic would remain here. It was impossible she could proceed. Were these rooms vacant?

Rooms vacant! Mrs. Dodge, in a pair of enormous earrings, with the gold cross glittering on her bosom, lifted her fat hands in protestation. Theoretically, she never had a corner to spare in which she could stow away a mouse; practically, she so contrived that no wealthy-looking traveller ran a risk by "going further—of faring worse." On the present occasion "she was very full," she said. "Never was such markets; never was such a press of customers, calling here and calling there, and not to be served but with the best! Nevertheless, madam should have a room in five minutes! Alice, lay a fire in the Cedars. The room was warm and comfortable, but the look-out (into the stable-yard) hardly so airy as she could wish. Madam would excuse that—madam——" Here Mrs. Dodge, who was no fool, pulled herself short up. "She begged pardon. Her ladyship, she hoped, would find no complaints to make. She hoped her ladyship would be satisfied!"

Her ladyship simply motioned towards the staircase, up which Alice had run a moment before with a red-hot poker in her hand, and, preceded by Mrs.

Dodge, retired to the apartment provided for her, while a roar of laughter, in a tone that seemed not entirely strange, reached her ears from the bar, into which her new retainer had just dragged her luggage from off the coach.

Now the Marquise, though never before in England, was not yet ignorant of the general economy prevailing at the "Hamilton Arms," or the position of its different apartments. She had still continued her correspondence with Malletort, or rather she had suffered him to write to her, as formerly, when he chose.

His very last letter contained, amongst political gossip and protestations of friendship, a ludicrous description of his present lodgings, in which the very room she now occupied, opening through folding-doors into his own, was deplored as one of his many annoyances.

Even had she not known his step, therefore, she would have had no difficulty in deciding that it was the Abbé himself whom she now heard pacing the floor of the adjoining apartment, separated only by a thin deal door, painted to look like cedar-wood.

She was not given to hesitation. Trying the lock, she found it unfastened, and, taking off her travelling mask, opened the door noiselessly, to

stand like a vision in the entrance, probably the very last person he expected to see.

Malletort was a difficult man to surprise. At least he never betrayed any astonishment. With perfectly cool politeness he handed a chair, as if he had been awaiting her for an hour.

"Sit down, madame," said he, "I entreat you. The roads in this weather are execrable for travelling. You must have had a long and fatiguing journey."

She could not repress a laugh.

"It seems, then, that you expected me," she answered, accepting the proffered seat. "Perhaps you know why I have come."

"Without presumption," he replied, "I may be permitted to guess. Your charming daughter lives within half a league of this spot. You think of her day by day. You look on her picture at your *château*, which, by the way, is not too amusing a residence. You pine to embrace her. You fly on the wings of maternal love and tired post-horses. You arrive in due course, like a parcel. In short, here you are. Ah! what it is to have a mother's heart!"

She appreciated and admired his coolness. The man had a certain diplomatic kind of courage about

him, and was worth saving, after all. How must he have suffered, too, this poor Abbé, in his gloomy hiding-place, with the insufferable cooking that she could smell even here!"

"Abbé," she resumed, "I am serious, though you make me laugh. Listen. I did *not* come here to see my daughter, though I hope to embrace her this very night. More, I came to see *you*—to warn you that the sooner you leave this place the better. I know you too well to suppose you have not secured your retreat. Sound the *alerte*, my brave Abbé, and strike your tents without delay. Your plot has failed—the whole thing has exploded—and I have travelled night and day to save a kinsman, and, I believe, as far as his nature permits, a friend! There is nothing more to be said on the subject."

Malletort was moved, but he would not show it any more than he would acknowledge this intelligence came upon him like a thunder-clap. He fidgeted with some papers to hide his face for a moment, but looked up directly afterwards calm and clear as ever.

"I know—I know," said he. "I was prepared for this—though, perhaps, not quite so soon. I might have been prepared, too, for my cousin's

kindness and self-devotion. She has always been the noblest and bravest of women. Madame, you have by this, as by many previous benefits, won my eternal gratitude. We shall be uninterrupted here, and cannot be overheard. Detail to me the information that has reached you in the exact words used. I wish to see if it tallies with mine."

The Marquise related her interview with young Chateau-Guerrand, adding several corroborative facts she had learned in the capital, none of which were of much importance apart, though, when taken together, they afforded strong evidence that the British Government was alive to the machinations of the Abbé and his confederates.

"It is an utter rout," concluded the Marquise, contemptuously; "and there is no honour, as far as I can see, to save. Best turn bridle out of the press, Abbé, like a defeated king in the old romances, put spurs to your horse, and never look over your shoulder on the field you have deserted!"

"Not quite so bad as that, madame," replied he. "'Tis but a leak sprung as yet, and we may, perhaps, make shift to get safe into port after all. In the meantime, I need scarcely remain in such absolute concealment any longer. It must be known in London that I am here. Once more, madame,

accept my heartfelt thanks. When you see her this evening, commend me humbly to your beautiful daughter and to her husband, my old friend, the Captain of Musketeers."

So speaking, the Abbé held open the door of communication and bowed the Marquise into the adjoining room, where food and wine were served, with all the ceremonious grace of the old Court. His brow was never smoother, his smile never more assured; but as soon as he found himself alone, he sat down at the writing-table, and buried his face in his hands.

"So fair a scheme!" he muttered. "So deep! So well-arranged! And to fail at last like this! But what tools I have had to work with. What tools! What tools!"

Meantime two honest voices in the bar, were pealing louder and louder in joyous interchange of questions, congratulations, and entreaties to drink. The shouts of laughter that had reached the Marquise at the top of the stairs came from no less powerful lungs than those of Slap-Jack, who had stolen down from the Hill as usual for the hindrance of Alice in her household duties. He was leaning over her chair, probably to assist her in mending the house linen, when his occupation was interrupted by the

arrival of a tall, dried-up looking personage dressed in a long duffle coat, who entered the *sanctum* with a valise and other luggage in his hands. Something in the ship-shape accuracy with which he disposed of these roused Slap-Jack's professional attention, and when the stranger turning round pushed his hat off his forehead, and shut one eye to have a good look, recognition on both sides was instantaneous and complete.

"Why, Alice, it's Smoke Jack!" exclaimed her sweetheart, while volumes would have failed to express more of delight and astonishment than the new-comer conveyed in the simple ejaculation, "Well! Blow me!"

A bowl of punch was ordered, and pipes were lit forthwith, Alice filling her lover's coquettishly, and applying a match to it with her own pretty fingers. Smoke Jack looked on approving, and winked several times in succession. Mentally he was scanning the damsel with a critical eye, her bows, her run, her figure-head, her tackle, and the trim of her generally. When the punch came he filled three glasses to the brim, and observed with great solemnity:

"My sarvice to you, shipmate, and your consort. The sooner you two gets spliced the better. No

offence, young woman. If I'd ever come across such a craft as yourn, mate, I'd have been spliced myself. But these here doesn't swim to windward in shoals like black-fish, and I was never a chap to take and leap overboard promiscuous after a blessed mermyed acause she hailed me off a reef. That's why I'm a driftin' to leeward this day. I'll take it as a favour, young woman, if you'll sip from my glass!"

This was the longest speech Slap-Jack ever remembered from his shipmate, and was valued accordingly. It was obvious that Smoke Jack, contrary to his usual principles, which were anti-matrimonial, looked on his old friend's projected alliance with the utmost favour. The three found themselves extremely pleasant company. Alice, indeed, moved in and out on her household duties, rendered the more engrossing that her aunt was occupied in the kitchen, but the two seamen stuck to the leeside of their bowl of punch till it was emptied, and never ceased smoking the whole time. They had so much to talk about, so many old stories to recal, questions to ask, and details to furnish on their own different fortunes since they met, to say nothing of the toasts that accompanied each separate glass. They drank "The Bashful Maid" twice, and "Alice" three times, in the course of their merry-

making. Now it came to pass that during their conversation the name of Captain Bold was mentioned by Slap-Jack, as an individual whose head it would give him extreme gratification to punch on some fitting occasion, and that his friend showed some special interest in the subject appeared by the cock of his eye and the removal of his pipe from between his lips.

"Bold!" repeated Smoke Jack, as if taxing his memory. "Captain Bold you calls him. Not a real skipper, but only a soger captain, belike?"

"Not even good enough for a soger to my thinking," answered the other, in a tone of disgust. "Look ye here, brother, I've heard some of the old hands say, though, mind ye, I doesn't go along with them, that sogers is like onions, never looks so well as when you hangs them up in a string. But this here captain's not even good enough for hanging, though he'll come to the yard-arm at last, or I'm mistaken."

Again Smoke Jack pondered, and took a pull at his punch.

"A flaxen-haired chap," inquired he, "with a red nose and a pair of cunning eyes. As thirsty as a sand-bank, and hails ye in a voice like the boatswain's whistle?"

"That's about the trim, all but the hair," answered his friend. "To be sure, he may have hoisted a wig. This beggar's got the gift of the gab, though, and pays ye out a yarn as long as the maintop bowline."

"It *must* be the same," said Smoke Jack, and proceeded to relate his grievances, which were as follow:

Paid off from a cruise, and finding he was pretty well to do in the world, Smoke Jack had resolved to amuse himself in London by studying life in a more enlarged phase than was afforded at his usual haunts near the river-side. For this purpose he had dressed himself in a grave suit, which made him look like some retired merchant captain, and in that character frequented the more respectable ordinaries about the Savoy and such civilized parts of the town. Here he made casual acquaintances, chiefly of sedate exterior, especially affecting those who assumed a wise port and talked heavy nonsense in the guise of philosophy.

Not many weeks ago he had met a person at one of these dinner-tables, with whose conversation he was much delighted. Flaxen-haired, dark-eyed, red-nosed, with a high voice, and of *quasi*-military appearance, but seeming to be well versed in a spurious kind of science, and full of such grave saws

and aphorisms as made a deep impression on a man like Smoke Jack, reflective, uneducated, and craving for intellectual excitement. That he could not understand half the captain said did but add to the charm of that worthy's discourse, and for two days the pair were inseparable. On the third they concluded a dry argument on fluids, with the appropriate termination of a debauch, and the landsman drugged the sailor's liquor, so as to rob him of his purse, containing twenty-five broad pieces, with the utmost facility, whilst he slept.

Waking and finding his companion and his money gone, while the score was left unpaid, Smoke Jack remembered to have seen the captain stroke the neck of a bay mare held by a boy at the door of the tavern they entered, though he denied all knowledge of the animal. After this, the sailor never expected to set eyes on his scientific friend again.

The mention of the bay mare proved beyond a doubt that the two shipmates owed a grudge to the same individual. They laid their heads together to pay it off accordingly, and called Alice, who was nowise unwilling, into council.

Her feminine aversion to violence dissuaded them from their first intention of avenging their grievances by the strong hand.

"It's far better that such boasters as the captain should be frightened than hurt," observed gentle Alice. "If I'd my way, he should be well scared once for all, like a naughty child, and then, perhaps, he'd never come here any more."

Smoke Jack listened as if spell-bound to hear a woman speak so wisely; but her sweetheart objected:

"It's not so easy to frighten a man, Alice. I don't quite see my bearings how to set about it."

"He's not like *you*, dear," answered Alice, with a loving smile, and showing some insight into the nature of true courage. "It would be easy enough to scare *him*, for I've heard him say many a time he feared neither man nor devil, and if Satan himself was to come across him, he'd turn him round and catch him by the tail."

"I should like to see them grapple-to!" exclaimed both seamen simultaneously.

"Well," answered Alice, in her quiet voice, "old Robin skinned our black bullock only yesterday. Hide, and horns, and tail are all together in the corner of the cow-house now. I'm sure I quite shuddered when I went by. It's an ugly sight enough, and I'm very much mistaken if it wouldn't frighten a braver man than Captain Bold!"

CHAPTER XVI.

FOREARMED.

NOTWITHSTANDING the excitement under which she laboured, and the emotion she painfully though contemptuously kept down, Madame de Montmirail could not but smile at the unpretending mode in which she reached her daughter's new home. Slap-Jack, leading an old pony, that did all the odd work of the "Hamilton Arms," and that now swayed from side to side under the traveller's heavy valises, showed the way across the moor, while the Marquise, on a pillion, sat behind Smoke Jack, who, by no means at home in the position, bestrode a stamping cart-horse with unexampled tenacity, and followed his shipmate with perhaps more circumspection, and certainly less confidence than if he had

been steering the brigantine through shoal water in a fog. He was by no means the least rejoiced of the three to "make the lights" that twinkled in the hospitable windows of Hamilton Hill.

It is needless to enlarge on the reception of so honoured a guest as Lady Hamilton's mother, or the delighted welcome, the affectionate inquiries, the bustle of preparation, the running to and fro of servants, the tight embrace of Cerise, the cordial greeting of Sir George, the courteous salute of Florian, and the strange restraint that, after the first demonstrative warmth had evaporated, seemed to lour like a cloud over the whole party. Under pretext of the guest's fatigue, all retired earlier than usual to their apartments; yet long before they broke up for the night, the quick perceptions of the Marquise warned her something was wrong, and this because she read Sir George's face with a keener eye than scanned even her daughter's. How handsome he looked, she thought, standing stately in the doorway of his hall to greet her with the frank manly courtesy of which she knew the charm so well. Yes, Cerise was indeed a lucky girl! and could she be unworthy of her happiness? Could she have mismanaged or trifled with it? This was always the way. Those who possessed the treasure

never seemed to appreciate its worth. Ah! It was a strange world! She had hoped Cerise would be so happy! And now—and now. Could the great sacrifice have been indeed offered up in vain?

Cerise was a good girl too; so kind, so truthful, so affectionate. Yet in the present instance, if a shadow had really come between husband and wife, Cerise must be in the wrong!

Women generally argue thus when they adjudicate for the sexes. In the absence of proof they almost invariably assume that their own is in fault. Perhaps they decide from internal evidence, and know best.

Lady Hamilton accompanied the Marquise to her bedroom, where mother and daughter found themselves together again as they used to be in the old days. It was not quite the same thing now. Neither could tell why, yet both were conscious of the different relation in which they stood to each other. It was but a question of perspective after all. Formerly the one looked up, the other down. Now they occupied the dead level of a common experience, and the mother felt her child was in leading-strings no more.

Then came the old story; the affectionate fencing-match, wherein one tries to obtain a full and free

confession without asking a single direct question, while the other assumes an appearance of extreme candour, to cover profound and impenetrable reserve. The Marquise had never loved her child so little as when the latter took leave of her for the night, having seen with her own eyes to every appliance for her mother's comfort, combining gracefully and fondly the solicitude of a hostess with the affectionate care of a daughter; and Lady Hamilton, seeking her own room, with a pale face and a heavy heart, wondered she could feel so little inspirited by dear mamma's arrival, and acknowledged with a sigh that the bloom was gone from everything in life, and the world had grown dull and dreary since this cold shadow came between her and George.

He alone seemed satisfied with the turn affairs had taken. There need be no more hesitation now, and it was well to know the worst. Sir George's demeanour always became the more composed the nearer he approached a disagreeable necessity. Though Madame de Montmirail's arrival had exceedingly startled him, as in the last degree unexpected, he received her with his customary cordial hospitality. Though he had detected, as he believed, a deliberate falsehood, told him for the first time by the wife of his bosom, he in no way altered the re-

served, yet good-humoured, kindness of manner with which he forced himself to accost her of late. Though he had discovered, as he thought, a scheme of black and unpardonable treachery on the part of his friend, he could still afford the culprit that refuge which was only to be found in his protection; could treat him with the consideration due to every one beneath his own roof.

But none the more for this did Sir George propose to sit down patiently under his injuries. I fear the temper cherished by this retired captain of Musketeers savoured rather of a duellist's politeness than a philosopher's contempt, or the forgiveness of a Christian. When he sought his chamber that night, the chamber in which stood the unfinished model of his brigantine, and from the window of which he had watched his wife and Florian on the terrace, there was an evil smile round his lips, denoting that thirst of all others the most insatiable, the thirst for blood. He went calmly through the incidents of the past day, as a man adds up a sum, and the wicked smile never left his face. Again he saw his wife's white dress among the roses, and her graceful figure bending over the flower-beds with that pale dark-eyed priest. Every look of both, every gesture, seemed stamped in fire on his brain.

He remembered the eagerness with which she brought out her packet and confided it to the Jesuit. He had not forgotten the cold, haughty tone in which she told him, *him*, her husband, who perhaps had some little right to inquire, that it contained letters for her mother in France. In France! And that very night her mother appears at his own house in the heart of Great Britain!

He shuddered in a kind of pity to think of his own Cerise descending to so petty a shift. Poor Cerise! Perhaps, after all, this coquetry was bred in her, and she could not help it. She was her mother's own daughter, that was all. He remembered there used to be strange stories about the Marquise in Paris, and he himself, if he had chosen—well, it was all over now; but he ought never to have intrusted his happiness to *that* family. Of course if a married woman was a thorough coquette, as a Montmirail seemed sure to be, she must screen herself with a lie! It was contemptible, and he only despised her!

But was nobody to be punished for all the annoyances thus thrust upon himself—the disgrace that had thus overtaken his house? The smile deepened and hardened now, while he took down a glittering rapier from the wall, and examined blade and hilt

carefully, bending the weapon and proving its temper against the floor.

His mind was made up what to do, and to-morrow he would set about his task.

So long as Florian remained under his roof, he argued, the rights of hospitality required that a host should be answerable for his guest's safety. Nay more, he would never forgive himself if, from any undue haste or eagerness of his own, the satisfaction should elude him of avenging his dishonour for himself. What gratification would it be to see the Jesuit hanged by the neck on Tower Hill? No, no. His old comrade and lieutenant should die a fairer death than that. Die like a soldier, on his back, with an honourable man's sword through his heart. But how if it came about the other way? Florian's was a good blade, the best his own had ever crossed. He flourished his wrist involuntarily, remembering that deadly disengagement which had run poor Flanconnade through the body, and was the despair of every scientific fencer in the company. What if it should be his own lot to fall? Well, at least, he would have taken no advantage, he would have fought fair all through, and Cerise, in the true spirit of coquetry, would love him very dearly, when she found she was never to see him again.

He resolved, therefore, that he and Florian should depart forthwith. His own character for loyalty stood so high, his intimacy with Sir Marmaduke Umpleby and other gentlemen in authority was so well known, that he anticipated no danger of discovery to any one who travelled under his protection. Monsieur St. Croix should simply assume the ordinary dress of a layman; they would not even ride on horseback. Every precaution should be taken to avoid notice, and the "Flying Post" coach with its interminable crawl, and innumerable delays, would probably answer the purpose of unpretending secrecy better than any other mode of conveyance, especially when they approached London. Thence, without delay, they would post to the seaboard, charter a fast-sailing lugger, and so proceed in safety to the coast of France. Once there, they would be on equal terms, and no power on earth should come between them then. He liked to think of the level sand, the grey sky overhead, the solitary shore, the moaning wave, not a soul in sight or hearing but his enemy, and his own point within six inches of that enemy's throat!

Sir George's night was disturbed and restless, but he slept sound towards morning, as he had accustomed himself in his former life to sleep at any

given time, after he had placed his sentries on an outpost, or gone below to his cabin for an hour's rest while giving chase to a prize.

When he awoke, a cold grey sky loured overhead, and a light fall of snow sprinkled the ground. It was the first morning of winter come earlier than usual even to those bleak moorlands, and strange to say, a foolish, hankering pity for Lady Hamilton's roses was the feeling uppermost in his mind, while he looked gloomily out upon the terrace. "Poor Cerise!" he muttered. "Bleak sky and withered flowers—lover and husband both gone by this time to-morrow! She will be lonely at first, no doubt, and it is fortunate her mother should have arrived last night. But she will console herself. They always do. Ah! these women, these women! That a man should ever be such an idiot as to intrust his honour. Psha! his honour has nothing to do with it —his happiness, nay his mere comfort in their hands. There is something even ludicrous in the infatuation. It reminds me of Madame Parabére's monkey playing with the Regent's porcelain flower-basket!—a laugh, a chatter, a stealthy glance or two and down goes the basket. What does it matter? They are all alike, I suppose, and cannot help themselves. A man's dog is faithful, his horse is honest,

his very hawk stoops to no lure but her master's; while his wife— And I loved her—I loved her. Fool that I am, I love her still! By the faith of a gentleman, Monsieur de St. Croix, you will need every trick of the trade to keep my point off your body, if I once get you within distance!"

Then Sir George descended to meet his guest with a quiet manner and an unclouded brow, though the murderous smile still hovered about his mouth.

"Florian," said he, "do not condemn my hospitality if I announce that you must depart this evening. Hamilton Hill is no longer a sure refuge, though I believe that my company can still afford you protection—therefore I travel with you. I do not leave you till I see you landed in France. Till I have placed you in safety it concerns my honour, that you should be my care. But not a moment longer—not a moment longer, remember that! You had better walk quietly down to the 'Hamilton Arms' during the day. I will follow with your luggage and my own. We shall proceed to London in the weekly coach, which passes southward to-night. We can be across the water by the fifth day. Do you understand? The fifth day. You must be well armed. Take any sword of mine that pleases you, only be sure you choose one with two feet six

inches of blade, and not too pliant ; you might meet with an adversary who uses brute force rather than skill. A strong arm drives a stiff blade home. In the meantime I recommend you to make your farewell compliments at once to the Marquise and—and Lady Hamilton."

Florian assented, confused and stupefied like one in a dream. The hour he had expected was come at last, and seemed none the more welcome for his expectation. He must go—must leave the woman he worshipped, and the man whom, strange to say, he loved as a brother, though that woman's husband. His senses seemed numbed, and he felt that to-day he could scarcely appreciate his desolate condition. To-morrow it would not matter. There was no to-morrow for him. Henceforth everything would be a blank. What was it Sir George had said about a sword? Ah! the weapon might prove his best friend. One home-thrust would put an end to all his sufferings. His heart was dead within him, but he would see Cerise once more before he left. A quick sharp pang warned him that his heart was not yet paralyzed, when he reflected how the Marquise was here, and he would not, therefore, see Lady Hamilton alone.

But the latter, pitiful, perhaps, because of her

own sorrow, met him by one of those accidents that are essentially feminine, as he traversed the hall, booted and cloaked for his departure. She gave him her hand kindly, and he pressed it to his lips. He knew then, while she passed on, that never in this world was he to set eyes on her again.

The door clanged to, the wind moaned, the crisp brown leaves eddied round his feet on the frozen path, the cold struck to his very heart. How dreary looked the white outline of those swelling moors, against the black laden clouds that scowled behind the hill.

But Sir George was careful to avoid an uninterrupted interview with his wife. He shut himself into his own apartment, and found the time pass quicker than he expected, for he had many dispositions to make, many affairs of business to arrange. If he came alive out of that prospective conflict, he meant to be absent from England for an indefinite period. Come what might, he would never see Cerise again. Not that he believed her guilty—no, he said to himself, a thousand times, but she was as bad as guilty —she had deceived him—she could never have loved him. It was all over. There was nothing more to be said.

The early night began to close ere his last pile of

papers was burned, his last packet sealed. Then Sir George took the compromising list of his friends and neighbours with which Florian had entrusted him, and placed it carefully in his breast. It might be an effective weapon, he thought, if the Jesuit should prove restive about leaving England, or if he himself should meet with opposition from any of the confederates. A brace of pistols were now to be loaded and disposed in the large pockets of his riding-coat, the trusty rapier to be buckled on, hat, gloves, and cloak to be placed on the hall-table, Slap-Jack summoned to be in readiness with the luggage, and Sir George was prepared for his journey.

Not till these arrangements were made did he seek Lady Hamilton's withdrawing-room, where, perhaps to his disappointment, he found the Marquise alone.

His wife, however, soon entered, and accosted him with a very wife-like inquiry:

"Have you had no dinner, George? and before travelling too? We would have waited, but the servants said you had given orders not to be disturbed."

"Sleep is food," observed the Marquise. "I believe you have been preparing for your journey with a *siesta*?"

How homelike and comfortable looked the pretty

room with its blazing fire, and its beautiful occupants! And perhaps, he was never to see it again, was certainly never again to hear the voice he loved, in that endearing and familiar tone.

But he would not pain his wife, even now. As far as *he* could spare her, she should be spared. They must not part on any terms but those of kindness and goodwill. He drew her towards his chair and called her by her Christian name.

"I would have dined with you, indeed, but I had not a moment to bestow," said he, "and the Marquise will excuse ceremony in such a family-party as ours. You will take care of Cerise, madame, when I am gone? I know I can trust her safely with *you*."

The tears were standing in Lady Hamilton's eyes, and she bent her face towards her husband.

"You will come back soon, George?" said she, in a broken voice. "London is not so far. Promise me you will only be a week away."

He drew her down and kissed her, once, twice, fondly, passionately, but answered not a word. Then he took leave of the Marquise with something less than his usual composure, which she did not fail to remark, and notwithstanding a certain delay in the hall, of which Cerise tried in vain to take

advantage for another embrace, he summoned Slap-Jack, and departed.

"My head must be going," thought Sir George, as he walked with his old foretopman across the frozen park. "I could have sworn I put both gloves on the hall-table, with my hat. Never mind, I have *one* left, at least, for Monsieur de St. Croix to take up. Five days more—only five days more! and then——"

Slap-Jack, looking into his master's face under the failing light, saw something there that strangely reminded him of the night when the captain of "The Bashful Maid" passed his sword through Hippolyte's black body at *Cash-à-crou*.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ADDLED EGG.

"GO ahead, Jack!" said the baronet, after they had crunched the frozen snow in silence for a quarter of a mile. "See that everything is ready, and secure a couple of berths in the 'Weekly Dispatch,' or whatever they call that lumbering 'Flying Post' coach's consort, for the whole trip. I'll be down directly."

"For you and me, Sir George?" asked Slap-Jack, exhilarated by the prospect of a voyage to London. "Deck passengers, both, if I may be so bold? The fore-hold of a slaver's a joke to them London coaches, between decks."

"Do as you're ordered," answered his master, "and be smart about it. Keep your tongue between

your teeth, and wait at the 'Hamilton Arms' till I come."

Sir George was obviously disinclined for conversation, and Slap-Jack hastened on forthwith, delighted to have an hour or two of leisure in his favourite resort, for reasons which will hereafter appear.

No sooner was his servant out of sight than the baronet retraced his steps, and took up a position under some yew-trees, so as to be completely screened from observation. Hence he could watch the door opening on his wife's garden, and the windows of the gallery, already lighted, which she must traverse to reach her own room.

It was a pitiful weakness, he thought, but it could do no harm just to see her shadow pass once more for the last, last time!

Meanwhile, Slap-Jack, arriving all in a glow at the "Hamilton Arms," found that hostelry in a great state of turmoil and confusion; the stables were full of horses, the parlours were crowded with guests, even the bar was thronged with comers and goers, most of whom had a compliment to spare for Mistress Alice. It was some minutes before she could find an opportunity of speaking to him, but the whisper must have been ludicrous as well as affec-

tionate, for her sweetheart burst out laughing, and exploded again at intervals, while he sat with Smoke Jack over a cup of ale in the tap.

The two shipmates adjourned presently to the stable, where they were followed by Alice, with a lanthorn, an armful of waxed twine, and a large needle, furnished by the elder seaman, such as is used for thrumming sails.

Their occupation seemed to afford amusement, for they laughed so much as greatly to endanger the secrecy enjoined by their feminine assistant, who was so pleased with its progress that she returned to visit them more than once, from her avocations in the bar.

The press of company to-night at the "Hamilton Arms" consisted of a very different class from the usual run of its customers; the horses in the stable were well-bred, valuable animals, little inferior in quality to Captain Bold's bay mare herself; the guests, though plainly dressed, were of a bearing that seemed at once to extinguish the Captain's claims to consideration, and caused him to slink about in a very unassuming manner, till he had fortified his failing audacity with strong drink. They threw silver to old Robin the ostler, and called for measures of claret or burnt sack, with

an unostentatious liberality that denoted habits of affluence, while their thoughtful faces and intellectual features, seemed strangely at variance with the interest they displayed in the projected cock-fight, which was their ostensible cause of gathering. A match for fifty broad pieces a side need scarcely have elicited such eager looks, such anxious whispers, such restless, quivering gestures, above all, such morbid anxiety for the latest news from the capital. They wore their swords, in which there was nothing remarkable, but every man was also provided with a brace of pistols, carried on his person, as though loth to trust the insecurity of saddle-holsters.

Malletort walked about from one to the other like the presiding genius of the commotion. For these he had a jest, for those a secret, for all a word of encouragement, a smile of approval; and yet busy as he was, he never took his eye off Florian, watching him as one watches a wild animal caught in a snare, too weak to ensure its capture, and likely to break with every struggle.

Without appearing to do so, he had counted over the guests, and found their number complete.

"Gentlemen," said he, in a loud, open voice, "I have laid out pen-and-ink in the Cedars, as my

poor apartment is loftily entitled. If you will honour me so far, I propose that we now adjourn to that chamber, and there draw out the conditions of our match!"

Every man of them knew he had a halter round his neck, and the majority were long past the flush of youth, yet they scuffled up-stairs, and played each other practical jokes, like schoolboys, as they shouldered through the narrow doorway into the room.

Malletort, signing to Captain Bold, and taking Florian's arm, brought up the rear.

"How now, Mrs. Dodge?" he called out, as he crossed the threshold. "I ordered a fire to be lighted. What have you been about?"

"Alice must be sent for! Alice had been told! Alice had forgotten! How careless of Alice!" And Mrs. Dodge, in the presence of such eligible customers, really felt much of the sorrow she expressed for her niece's thoughtlessness.

When Alice did arrive to light the fire, her candle went out, her paper refused to catch, her sticks to burn; altogether, she put off so much time about the job, that, despite her good looks, the meeting lost patience, and resolved to go to business at once, Captain Bold, who had recovered

his impudence, remarking that, "If what he heard from London was true, some of them would have warm work enough now, before all was done!"

The Captain seemed a privileged person, all eyes turned on him anxiously, while several eager voices asked at once,

"What more have you heard?"

Bold looked to the Abbé for permission, and on a sign from the latter, handed him a letter, which Malletort retained unopened in his hand.

Sensations of excitement and even apprehension now obviously pervaded the assembly. Rumours had as usual mysteriously flown ahead of the real intelligence they were about to learn, and men looked in each other's faces, for the encouragement they desired, in vain.

"Gentlemen," said the Abbé, taking his place at the table, and motioning the others to be seated whilst he remained standing, "if I fail to express myself as clearly as I should wish, I pray you attribute my shortcomings to a foreign idiom, and an ignorance of your expressive language, rather than to any doubt or hesitation existing in my own mind, as to our line of conduct in the present crisis. I will not conceal from you—why should I conceal from you, nay, how *can* I conceal from you?—that

the moment of action has now arrived. I look around me, and I see on every countenance but one expression, a noble and courageous anxiety to begin."

Murmurs of applause went through the apartment, while two or three voices exclaimed, "Hear! hear!" "Well said!" "Go on!"

"Yes, gentlemen," resumed the Abbé, "the moment has at last arrived, the pear is ripe, and has dropped off the wall from its own weight. The first shot, so to speak, has been fired by the enemy. It is the signal for attack. Gentlemen, I have advices here informing me that the Bishop of Rochester has been arrested, and is now imprisoned in the Tower."

His listeners rose to a man, some even seizing their hats, and drawing the buckles of their sword-belts, as if under an irresistible impulse to be off. One by one, however, they sat down again with the same wistful and even ludicrous expression of shame on the countenance of each, like a pack of fox-hounds, that have been running hare.

The reaction did not escape Malletort, who was now in his element.

"I should have been unworthy of your confidence, gentlemen," he proceeded, with something

of triumph in his tone, "had such a blow as this fallen, and found me unprepared. I was aware it had been meditated—I was even aware that it had been resolved on—and although the moment of execution could only be known to the government, I learned enough yesterday to impress on me the policy of calling together this influential meeting to-night. Our emissary, Captain Bold, here, will tell you that the intelligence had only reached his colleague at the next post two hours ago, though it travelled from London as fast as your English horses can gallop and your English couriers can ride. It must be apparent to every gentleman here, that not another moment should be lost. My lord, I will ask your lordship to read over the resolutions as revised and agreed to, at our last meeting."

He bowed low to an elderly and aristocratic-looking personage, who, taking a paper from the Abbé's hands, proceeded somewhat nervously to read aloud as follows :—

"Resolved—No. 1. That this Meeting do constitute itself a Committee of Direction, for the re-establishment of public safety, by authority of His Majesty King James III., as authorized under his hand and seal.

"No. 2. That the noblemen and gentlemen whose

signatures are attached to the document annexed, do pledge themselves to act with zeal, secrecy, and unanimity, for the furtherance of the sacred object declared above.

"No. 3. That for this purpose, the oath be administered, jointly and severally, as agreed.

"No. 4. That the person now officially in correspondence with His Majesty's well-wishers in Artois, be appointed secretary to the Committee, with full powers, as detailed under the head of Secret Instructions for Committee of Safety, No. 7.

"No. 5. That the Secretary be authorized in all cases of emergency to call a meeting of the entire Committee at his discretion."

His lordship here paused to take breath, and Malletort again struck in—

"By authority of that resolution, I have called you together to-night. I cannot conceive it possible that there is present here one dissentient to our great principle of immediate action. Immediate, because thus only simultaneous. At the same time if any nobleman or gentleman at this table has a suggestion to make, let him now submit his views to the meeting."

Several heads were bent towards each other, and a good deal of conversation took place in whispers,

ere a stout good-humoured-looking man, constituting himself a mouth-piece for the rest, observed bluntly,

"Tell us your plan, Mr. Secretary, and we'll answer at once. Not one of us is afraid of a leap in the dark, or we should scarcely be here now; but there is no harm in taking a look whilst we can!"

A murmur of applause denoted the concurrence of the majority in this prudent remark, and Malletort, still with his eye on Florian, rose once more to address them.

"I need not recapitulate to this meeting, and especially to you, Sir Rupert (saluting the last speaker), all the details set forth in those secret instructions of which each man present has a copy. The invasion from the Continent will take place on the appointed day, but with this additional assurance of success, that three thousand Irish troops are promised from a quarter on which we can implicity rely. His lordship here, as you are aware, following the instincts of his illustrious line, assumes the post of honour, and the post of danger amongst us in the north, by placing himself at the head of a loyal and enthusiastic multitude, only waiting his signal to take up arms. You, Sir Rupert, have pledged yourself and your dalesmen to overawe

the whigs and puritans of the east. Other gentlemen now listening to me, are prepared to bring their several troops of an irregular, but highly efficient cavalry, into the field. To you, who are all intimately acquainted with our military dispositions, I need not insist on the certainty of success. Let each man read over his secret instructions and judge for himself. But, gentlemen, the scheme of a campaign on a grand scale is not all with which we have to occupy ourselves. Something more than a military triumph, something more than a victorious battle, is indispensable to our complete success. And I need not remind you that there is no compromise between complete success and irremediable disaster. It is an unavoidable choice between St. James's Palace and Temple Bar. I now come to the germ of the undertaking—the essence of the whole movement—the key-stone of that bridge we must all pass over to reach the wished-for shore. I allude to the suppression of the Usurper and the fall of the House of Hanover."

A stir, almost a shudder, went through the assemblage. Men looked askance at the papers on the table, the buckles of their sword-belts, the spur-leathers on their boots, anything rather than betray to their neighbours either too eager an appre-

hension of the Abbé's meaning, or too cold an approval of his object. He was speaking high treason with a vengeance, and the one might place them in too dangerous a prominence, while the other might draw down the equally dangerous mistrust of their fellow-conspirators. Malletort knew well what was passing in his hearers' minds, but he never expected to get the iron hotter than it was to-night, and he struck at it with his whole force.

"The arrangements for our great blow," said he, "have been confided to a few zealous loyalists with whose plans, as your Secretary, I have been made acquainted. In five days from the present, King George, as he is still called, returns to Kensington. He will arrive at the palace about dusk. What do I say? He will never arrive there at all! Captain Bold here, whom I have had the honour to present to this meeting, has organized a small body of his old comrades, men of tried bravery and broken fortunes, who are pledged to possess themselves of the Usurper's person. His guard will be easily overpowered, for it will be outnumbered three to one. The titular Prince of Wales and his children will at the same time be made prisoners, and the chief officers of State secured, if possible

without bloodshed. Such a bold stroke, combined with a simultaneous rising here in the north, cannot but insure success. It is for you, gentlemen, to assemble your followers, to hold yourselves in readiness, and trusting implicitly to the co-operation of your friends in London, to declare on the same day for His Majesty King James III. !"

The enthusiasm Malletort contrived to fling into his last sentence caught like wildfire.

"Long live James the Third !"—"Down with the Whigs !" exclaimed several of his listeners ; and Sir Rupert flung his hat to the low ceiling ere he placed it on his head, as if preparing to depart ; but the tall figure of the elderly nobleman, as he rose from his chair, seemed to dominate the tumult, and every syllable was distinctly audible, while he inquired, gravely :

"Can this be accomplished without violence to the person of him whom we deem a Usurper ?"

Only the narrowest observers could have detected the sneer round Malletort's mouth, while he replied :

"Certainly, my lord !—certainly ! With as little personal violence as is possible, when armed men are fighting round a King in the dark ! My lord, if you please, we will now pass on to a few trifling

matters of finance, after which I need detain the meeting no longer."

The meeting, as usual, was only too happy to be dissolved. In less than ten minutes hats and cloaks were assumed, reckonings paid, horses led out from the stable, and riders, with anxious hearts, diverging by twos and threes on their homeward tracks.

There was no question, however, about the cock-fight which was supposed to have called these gentlemen together.

Malletort, Florian, and Captain Bold remained in the Cedars. The two priests seemed anxious, thoughtful, and preoccupied; but the Captain's eye twinkled with sly glances of triumphant vanity, and he appeared extremely self-satisfied, though a little fidgety, and anxious for his employer to leave the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HORNS AND HOOFS.

"THERE is nothing but the Declaration to be provided for now," observed Malletort, after a pause. "You had better give it me back, Florian, even without Sir George's name subscribed. He is a man of mettle, and will be in the saddle as soon as he hears steel and stirrup ring."

Although the Abbé did not fail to observe how strange an alteration had to-day come over his young friend's manner, he simply attributed it to the qualms of conscience which are often so embarrassing to beginners in the science of deception, but which, as far as his own experience served him, he had found invariably disappeared with a little practice. He never doubted that Florian was

equally interested with himself in the success of their undertaking, though for different reasons. He attributed only to nervousness, anxiety, and a foolish hankering after Lady Hamilton, the wildness of the young priest's dark eye—the fixed spot of colour in his cheek, lately so pale and wan—the resolute expression of his feminine mouth, denoting some desperate intention—and the general air of abstraction that showed as well unconsciousness of the present as recklessness of the future into which he seemed to project his whole being. The Abbé simply expected that Florian would place his hand in his bosom and bring out the roll of paper required. He was surprised, therefore, to receive no answer, and repeated, hastily, for he had still a press of business to get through:

"The manifesto, my friend—quick! It must be retained in my care till it is printed!"

Florian woke up from a brown study, and looked vacantly around.

"It is still in Sir George's hands," said he. "I believe I have asked him for it more than once, but I could not get it back."

"In Sir George's hands!" repeated the Abbé, almost losing patience, "and without Sir George's signature! Do you know what you are saying?

Florian, listen, man, and look up. Are you awake?"

The other passed his hand wearily across his brow.

"I have slept little of late," was all he answered. "It is as I tell you."

Even Captain Bold could not but admire the Abbé's self-control, that kept down the impatience naturally resulting from such a confession, so composedly announced. He mused for a moment, with his peculiar smile, and observed, quietly:

"You travel to London to-night, I believe, and you travel together?"

Florian only bowed his head in reply.

"I wish you a pleasant journey," continued the Abbé. "Had you not better go now, and make the necessary preparations?"

Then, as soon as the door closed on Florian, who walked out dejectedly, without another word, he grasped Captain Bold's arm, and laughed a low, mocking laugh.

"Business increases, Captain," said he. "Yours is a trade sure to thrive, for its occasions come up fresh every day. Did you hear that Sir George Hamilton possesses a paper I require? and that he proceeds to London to-night?"

"I heard it," answered the Captain, doggedly.

He, too, knew something of Sir George, and did not much relish the job which he began to suspect was provided for him.

"That paper must be in my hands before daybreak," continued the Abbé, speaking in such low, distinct accents, as his emissary had already learned admitted of no appeal. "You will name your own price, Captain Bold, and you will bring me what I require—as little blood on it as possible—at least two hours before dawn."

The Captain pondered, and his face fell.

"Do you know how Sir George travels?" said he, in his high, quavering voice, more tremulous than its wont. "There has been such a press of work lately, that I am rather short both of men and horses. If he takes anything like a following with him, it might come to a coil; and such jobs won't bear patching. They must be done clean or let alone. That's my principle! He's a cock of the game this, you see," added the Captain, apologetically; "and you'll not cut his comb without a thick pair of gloves on, I'll warrant him!"

"Permit me to observe, my friend," replied Malletort, coolly, "that this is a mere matter of detail with which I can have no concern. It is

not the least in my line, but exclusively in yours. Must I repeat? You name your own price, and work in your own way."

"It cannot be done without cutting his throat," said Bold, despondingly, regretting the while, not so much a necessity for bloodshed, as his own sorry chance of carrying out the adventure with a whole skin.

"Of course not," assented the Abbé. "Why, he was in the Grey Musketeers of the King!"

"To-night, you say," continued the Captain, in the same mournful tone. "I wonder if he rides that bay with the white heels. I've seen him turn the horse on a sixpence, and he's twice as heavy as my mare."

Again Malletort laughed his low, mocking laugh.

"Fear not," said he; "there need be no personal collision on foot or on horseback. Sir George travels by the heavy post-coach, like any fat grazier or cattle-dealer, whom you may bid 'Stand and deliver!' without a qualm."

"By the coach!" repeated Bold, his face brightening. "That's a different job altogether. That makes the thing much more like business, especially if there's many passengers. You see, they frighten

and hamper one another. Why, if there's a stoutish old woman or two anyways near him, it's as likely as not they'll pinion Sir George by both arms, and hold on till we've finished. Screaming awful, of course! But you won't make any difference in the price on account of the coach; now, will you? Even chancing the old women, you see, we're very short-handed to do it clean."

"I have said more than once, name your own price," answered the Abbé. "I deduct nothing for a friend whom I will myself place by Sir George's side, and who will do the pinioning you speak of more effectually, if with less noise, than a ton of old women. How many hands can you muster?"

"Mounted, of course?" replied the Captain. "There's myself, and Blood Humphrey, and Black George. I don't think I can count on any others, but we ought to have one more to do it handsome."

"I will come with you myself," said the Abbé. "I have a horse here in the stable, and better arms than any of you."

The Captain stared aghast, but so great was the respect with which Malletort inspired his subordinates, that he never dreamed for an instant of dissuading the Abbé from an adventure which he

might have thought completely out of a churchman's line. On the contrary, satisfied that whatever the chief of the plot undertook would be well accomplished, he looked admiringly in his principal's face, and observed:

"We'll stop them at the old thorns, half-way up Borrodaile Rise. The coach will back off the road, and likely enough upset in the soft moor. I'll cover Sir George, and pull the moment he's off his seat to get down. The others will rob the passengers, and—and I suppose there is nothing more to arrange?"

The Abbé, folding up his papers to leave the room, nodded carelessly and replied:

"We mount in half an hour. Through the heart, I think, Bold. The head is easily missed at a dozen paces, from the saddle."

"Through the heart," answered the captain, but Malletort had already quitted the room, and closed the door.

"Half an hour," mused Bold, now left to himself in the cold and dimly-lighted apartment. "In half an hour a good deal may be done both of love and war. And Alice promised to be here by now. I thought the gentlemen never *would* go away. What a time they were, to be sure! We make quicker

work of it in our trade. How cold it is! I wish I'd a glass of brandy, but I dursn't, no, I dursn't, though I'm all of a shake like. I'll have one 'steadier' just before I get on the mare. If I'm over-primed I shall miss him, and he's not the sort to give a chap a second chance. I wish this job was over. I never half-liked it from the first. Hush! I think that's Alice's cough. Poor little girl! She loves the very boots I wear. I wish she'd come, though. This room is cursed lonesome, and I don't like my own company unless I can have it really to myself. I always fancy there's somebody else I can't see. How my teeth chatter! It's the cold. It *must* be the cold! Well, there's no harm in lighting the fire, at any rate."

So speaking, or rather muttering, the Captain, on whose nerves repeated glasses of brandy at all hours of the day and night, had not failed to make an impression, proceeded to collect with trembling hands certain covers of dispatches, and other coarse scraps of paper left on the floor and table, which litter he placed carefully on the hearth, building the damp sticks over them skilfully enough, and applying his solitary candle to the whole.

His paper flared brightly, but with no other effect than to produce thick, stifling clouds of smoke from

the saturated fuel, and divers oaths spoken out loud from the disgusted Captain.

"May the devil fly away with them!" said he, in a towering rage, "to a place where they'll burn fast enough without lighting. And me, too!" he added, yet more wrathfully, "for wasting my time like a fool waiting for a jilt who can't even lay a fire properly in an inn chimney!"

The words had scarce left his lips when a discordant roar resounded, as it seemed, from the very wall of the house, and a hideous monster that he never doubted was the arch-fiend whom he had invoked, came sprawling on all-fours down the chimney which the smoke had refused to ascend, and made straight for the terrified occupant of the apartment, whose hair stood on end, and whose whole senses were for a moment paralyzed with horror and dismay.

In a single glance the Captain beheld the black shaggy hide, the wide-spreading horns, the cloven hoofs, the long and tufted tail! That glance turned him for one instant to a man of stone. The next, with an irrepressible shout that denoted the very anguish of fear, he sprang through the door, upsetting and extinguishing the candle in his flight, and hurried down-stairs, closely, though silently,

followed by the monster, who thus escaped from the room before Malletort, alarmed at the disturbance, could re-enter it with a light.

"He's not heart of oak, isn't that chap!" said Slap-Jack, as he turned noiselessly into the stable, where he proceeded to divest himself of the bullock's hide he had worn for his masquerade, and so much of the filth it had left as could be effaced by scraping his garments and washing face and hands with soap and water. But the jest which had been compiled so merrily with his friend and sweetheart seemed to have lost all its mirth in the execution, for the seaman looked exceedingly grave and thoughtful, stealing quietly into the bar in search of his shipmate, with whom he presently disappeared to hold mysterious conference outside the house, secure from all eavesdroppers.

Captain Bold, though for a short space well-nigh frightened out of his wits, was not so inexperienced in the maladies of those who, like himself, applied freely and continuously to the brandy-bottle, to be ignorant that such jovial spirits are peculiarly subject to hallucinations, and often visited by phantoms which only exist in their own diseased imaginations. He had scarcely reached the bar, therefore—a refuge he sought unconsciously and by instinct—ere he

recovered himself enough to remember that alcohol was the only specific for the horrors, and he proceeded accordingly to swallow glass after glass till his usual composure of mind should return. He was nothing loth to use the remedy, yet each succeeding draught, while it strung his nerves, seemed to increase his depression, and for the first time in his life, he felt unable to shake off an uncomfortable conviction, that whether the phantom was really in the chimney, or only in his own brain, he had that night received a warning, and was doomed.

There was little leisure, however, either for apprehension or remorse. Malletort booted and well armed beneath his cassock, was already descending the stairs, and calling for his horse. To judge by his open brow and jaunty manner, his final interview with Florian, whom he had again summoned for a few last words, must have been satisfactory in the extreme. The latter, too, carried his head erect, and there was a proud glance in his eye, as of one who marches to victory.

"You will not fail at the last moment?" said the Abbé, pressing St. Croix's hand while they descended the wooden staircase in company, and Florian's reply, "Trust me, I will not fail!" carried con-

viction even to the cold heart of the astute and suspicious churchman.

So Captain Bold tossed off his last glass of brandy, examined the priming of his pistols, and swung himself into the saddle. His staunch comrades were at his side. The Abbé, of whose administrative powers he entertained the highest opinion, was there to superintend the expedition. It was easy, it was safe. Once accomplished, his fortune was made for life. As they emerged upon the snow, just deep enough to afford their horses a sure foot-hold, the bay mare shook her bit and laid her ears back cheerfully. Even Black George, usually a saturnine personage, acknowledged the bracing influence of the keen night-air and the exhilarating prospect of action. He exchanged a professional jest with Blood Humphrey, and slapped his commander encouragingly on the shoulder; but, for all this, a black shadow seemed to hover between Captain Bold and the frosty stars—something seemed to warn him that the hour he had so often jested of was coming on him fast, and that to-night he must look the Death he had so lightly laughed at in the face.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SUBSTITUTE.

WE left Sir George watching in the cold, under a clump of yews, for the chance of seeing his wife's shadow cross one of the lighted windows in the gallery. He remained there far longer than he supposed. So many thoughts were passing through his mind, so many misgivings for the future, so many memories of the past, that he was conscious neither of bodily discomfort nor lapse of time, the chill night-wind, nor the waning evening. At length he roused himself from his abstraction with a smile of self-contempt, and, wrapping his cloak around him, would have departed at once, but that his attention was arrested by a muffled figure passing swiftly and stealthily into

the garden through the very door he had been watching so long. A thrill of delight shot through him at the possibility of its being Cerise, followed by one of anger and suspicion, as he thought she might, in sheer despair at her lover's absence, be preparing to follow Florian in his flight. But the figure walked straight to his hiding-place, and long before it reached him, even in the doubtful light, he recognised the firm step and graceful bearing of the Marquise.

How did she know he was there? How long could she have been watching him? He felt provoked, humiliated; but all such angry feelings dissolved at the sound of her sweet voice, so like her daughter's, while she asked him softly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that he should be waiting outside within twenty paces of his own house:

"George, what is it? You are disturbed; you are anxious. Can I help you? George, I would do anything in the world for you. Are you not dear to me as my own child, *almost?*"

He tried to laugh it off, but his mirth was forced and hollow.

"I have so many preparations to make. There are so many trifles to be thought of, even in leaving

a place like this, that really, madame, I was only waiting here for a while to remember if I had forgotten anything."

She laid her hand on his arm as she had laid it long ago at the masked ball, and perhaps the gesture brought back that time to both.

"Even if you can blind Cerise," she said, "you cannot deceive me. And Cerise, poor child, is crying her eyes out by herself; miserable, utterly miserable, as if you had gone away from her for ever. But it is no question now of my daughter; it is a question of yourself, *you*, George. You are unhappy, I tell you. I saw it as soon as I came here. And I have been watching ever since you left the house till it should be quite dark, to come and speak to you before you go, and ask for the confidence that heaven only knows how fully I, of all people, deserve."

There was a world of suppressed feeling in her voice while she spoke the last sentence, but he marked it not. He was thinking of Cerise; "miserable," said her mother, "utterly miserable, as if he had gone away from her for ever." Then it was for Florian she was grieving, of course. Bah! he had known it all through. Of what use was it thus to add proof to proof—to pile disgrace

upon disgrace? It irritated him, and he answered abruptly:

"You must excuse me, madame; this is no time for explanations, even were any necessary, and I have already loitered here too long."

She placed herself directly in his path, standing with her hands clasped, as was her habit when moved by any unusual agitation.

"If you had gone away at once," said she, "I was prepared to follow you. I have watched you from the moment you crossed the threshold. Am I blind? Am I a young inexperienced girl, who has never felt, never suffered, to be imposed on by a haughty bearing and a forced smile? Bah! Do people stand for an hour in the snow reflecting if they have forgotten their luggage? You men think women have no perception, no mind, no heart. You are going, George, and I shall never set eyes on you again—never, never; for I could not bear to see you miserable, and I alone of all the world must not endeavour to console you. Therefore, I do not fear to speak frankly now. Listen; something has come between you and Cerise. Do not interrupt me. I know it. I feel it. Do not ask me why. It is not your hand that should add one stripe to my punishment. George, my poor girl is breaking her

heart for your sake; and, you, you the man of all others, qualified to make a woman happy, and to be happy with her yourself, are destroying your home with your own hands. Look at me, George. I have seen the world, as you know. My lot has been brilliant, fortunate, envied by all; and yet—and yet —I have never had the chance that you so recklessly throw away. No, no; though I may have dreamed of it, I never so deceived myself as to fancy for a moment it was mine! Cerise loves you, George, loves the very ground you walk on, and you are leaving her in anger."

"I wish I could believe it," he muttered, in a hoarse, choking voice; for he was thinking of the pale, dark-eyed priest bending over the rose-trees with his wife.

"Do you think I can be deceived?" broke out the Marquise, seizing his hand with both her own, and then flinging it off in a burst of sorrowful reproach. "Wilful! heartless! cruel! Go, then, if go you must, and so farewell for ever. But remember, I warned you. I, who know by bitter experience, the madness, the shame, the agony of an impossible love!"

She turned from him and fled into the house, muttering, as she crossed its threshold, "The poor

pelican! how it must hurt when she digs her beak into her bosom, and feeds her young with her own heart's blood!"

Sir George Hamilton stood looking after her for a moment; then he shook his head, drew his cloak tighter round him, and strode resolutely across the park to the "Hamilton Arms."

Thus it fell out that when he arrived there, he found the hostelry, lately so full of guests, occupied only by Florian and the two seamen; the first depressed, silent, preoccupied; the others obviously swelling with importance, and bursting to communicate some great intelligence at once.

It was fortunate that the former commander of "The Bashful Maid" retained enough of his old habits to comprehend the tale Slap-Jack had to tell, garnished as it was with professional phrases and queer sea-going metaphors that no landsman could have followed out. From his faithful retainer the baronet learned all the particulars of the Jacobite meeting, and the conspiracy so carefully organized against the throne, discovered by no less futile a contingency than the freak of a barmaid to frighten a highwayman. Sir George believed it his duty now to warn the Government at once. Yet even while reflecting on the importance of his information, and

the noble reward it might obtain, he was pondering how he could escape the delay of an hour in London, and longing for the moment when he should find himself face to face with Florian on the coast of France.

It was characteristic of the man that he gave little thought to the attack meditated upon his own person, simply examining his arms as usual, and desiring Slap-Jack, who had come unprovided, to borrow a brace of pistols, wherever he could get them, while he bestowed on Smoke Jack, who piteously entreated leave to "join the expedition," a careless permission "to take his share in the spree if he liked."

So these four men waited in the warm inn-parlour for the roll of the lumbering coach that was to bear them, so each well knew, into a struggle for life and death.

When their vehicle arrived at last, they found themselves its only passengers. The burly coachman descending from his seat to refresh, cursed the cold weather heartily, and in the same breath tendered a gruff salutation to Sir George. The guard, whose face was redder, whose shoulders were broader, and whose voice was huskier than even the coachman's, endorsed his companion's remarks, and followed suit in his greetings to the baronet, observing at the

same time, that he should "take a glass of brandy neat, to drive the cold out of his stomach." This stimulant was accordingly administered by Alice, and paid for by Sir George, who had not lived at Hamilton Hill without learning the etiquette of coach-travelling, as practised on the north road. While he placed some silver on the counter, it did not escape him that both functionaries had been drinking freely, possibly to console them for the lack of company, while Slap-Jack, grinning in delight, whispered to his mate:

"If you an' me was to go for to take *our* spell at the wheel, half-slewed, like them chaps, my eyes, wot a twistin' *we* should get to-morrow mornin' afore eight bells!"

With so light a freight there was less delay in changing horses than usual. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had elapsed since its arrival, ere four moderate-looking animals were harnessed to the coach. The luggage was hoisted on, old Robin rewarded, Mrs. Dodge paid, Alice kissed with much energy by her sweetheart, and Sir George, with Florian, invited to take their places on the front seat behind the driver; then the two seamen clambered up beside the guard, the whip cracked, the hoofs clattered, the whole machine creaked and

jingled, while Smoke Jack, removing the pipe from his mouth with a certain gravity, expressed his devout hope that "old brandy-face would keep her well up in the wind and steer small!"

It was a cold night, and a cheerless, though light as day, for the moon had risen, and the ground was white with snow. Sir George, wrapped in his cloak, with his hand on the butt of a pistol, after some vague remarks about the weather, which Florian appeared not to hear, relapsed into the silence of one who prepares all his energies for an approaching crisis.

The Jesuit seemed unconscious of his companion's existence. Pale as death, even to the lips, his face set, his teeth clenched, his eyes fixed on the horizon before him, as his mental sight projected itself into the unknown future he had this night resolved to penetrate, there pervaded the whole bearing of the man that unearthly air of abstraction peculiar to those who are doomed, whose trial is over, whose sentence is recorded, for whom henceforth there can be neither hope nor fear.

Sir George meditated on a thousand possible contingencies. Already his mind had overleaped the immediate affairs of the night, the coming skirmish, and its possible disaster. These were but

everyday matters, familiar to his old habits, and scarce worth thinking of. But there was one scene beyond which his imagination could not be forced; it seemed, as it were, to limit his future in its bounds, and afterwards there would be no aim, no purpose, no relish in life. It represented a spit of sand on the coast of Picardy, and a man with shirt-sleeves rolled up, grasping a bloody rapier in his hand, who was smiling bitterly down on a dead face white and rigid at his feet.

Florian too, sitting by his side, had his own vision. This, also, was of blood, but blood freely offered in atonement to friendship, and expiation for love.

The night was still, and the moonlight tempered by a misty sky that denoted there would be more snow before morning. The coachman dozed over his wheelers. The guard, overcome with brandy, laid his head on a hamper, and went fast asleep. The two seamen, silently consoling themselves with tobacco, shut an eye apiece, and screwed their faces into the expression of inscrutable sagacity, affected by their class when they expect bad weather of any kind. The horses, taking counsel together, as such beasts do, jogged on at the slowest possible pace that could not be stigmatized for a walk, and the

heavy machine lumbered wearily up the gradual ascent, which half a mile further on, where the hill became steeper and the road worse, was known as Borrodaile Rise.

Now the Abbé, in command of his little troop, had intended to conceal them behind a clump of thorns that diversified the plain surface of the moor, almost on the summit of this acclivity, and so pounce out upon his prey at the moment it was most hampered by the difficulties of its path; but, like other good generals, he suffered his plans to be modified by circumstances, and would change them, if advisable, at the very moment of execution.

On the right of the road, if road that could be called, which was but a soft and deeply-rutted track through the heather, stood the four walls of a roofless building, uninhabited within the memory of man, about twenty paces from a deep holding slough, through which the coach must pass; this post, with the concurrence of Bold and his confederates, the Abbé seized at once. It offered them some shelter against the storms of sleet that drove at intervals across the moor, while it afforded a covert from which, though mounted, they could reconnoitre unseen, for two miles in every direction, and rush out at a moment's notice on their unsuspecting prey.

So, behind those grey, weather-stained walls, the little party sat their horses, erect and vigilant, reins shortened, fire-arms primed, swords loosened in the sheath, like a picket of light-cavalry when the alarm has sounded, and its outposts have been driven in.

The advancing coach made but little noise as it crept slowly onward through the snow, nevertheless a muttered oath from Blood Humphrey, and the scowl on Black George's brow, announced its arrival ere it came in sight. By the time it could emerge from a certain hollow at fifty yards' distance, and gain the slough, through which it moved heavily and wearily, like a hearse, its huge black mass brought out against the dead white of the misty, moonlit sky, afforded as fair a target for close-shooting as a marksman need desire.

Captain Bold had been trembling all over but a few minutes back, now he was firm as a rock, but it cost him a desperate effort thus to man himself, and even while he cocked the pistol in his right hand, gathering his mare at the same time, for a dash to the front, he wished, from the bottom of his heart, he had undertaken any job but this.

"Steady, my friend!" whispered the Abbé. "In ten more paces the whole machine must come to a

halt. At the instant it stops, cover your man, and level low!"

Then Malletort placed himself behind the others in readiness for any emergency that should arrive.

The slough reached nearly to the axles, the wheels scarce moved, the horses laboured—failed—stopped; the coachman, waking with a jerk, swore lustily as he nearly fell from his seat; the guard jumped up and shook himself; Florian's eyes flashed, and a strange, wild smile, played over his wan face; while Slap-Jack protested angrily, that "the lubber was aground, d'ye see? and however could he expect the poor thing would answer her helm, when she hadn't got no steerage-way!"

Even while he spoke, a horseman, rising, as it seemed, from the earth, dashed out before the leaders, followed by three more, who, in the hurry and confusion of the moment, looked like a dozen at least.

"Stand and deliver!" exclaimed the foremost, in the customary language of "the road;" but, without waiting to see if this formidable command would be obeyed, he pulled his bay mare together, till she stood motionless like a statue, covered the larger of the two figures behind the coachman, as it rose from its seat, and—fired!

Bold's hand and eye had never served him better than in this, his last crime; but he was anticipated, foiled by a quicker eye, a readier hand than his own. With the very flash of the pistol, even ere the smoke that curled above their heads had melted into air, a heavy body, falling across Sir George's knees, knocked him back into his seat, and Florian, shot through the lungs, lay gasping out his life in jets of blood with every breath he drew.

It was instinct, rather than inhumanity, that caused the old Musketeer to take steady aim at the assassin over the very body of his preserver. Ever coolest in extremity of danger, Sir George was, perhaps, surer of his mark here than he would have been shooting for a wager in the galleries of Marly or Versailles. Ere a man could have counted ten, his finger pressed the trigger, and Bold, shot clean through the heart, fell from the saddle in a heap, nor, after one quiver of the muscles, did he ever move again.

The bay mare, snorting wildly, would not leave her master, but snuffed wistfully and tenderly round that tumbled wisp of tawdry clothes, from which a crimson stain was soaking slowly into the snow.

Then Sir George turned to Florian, and rested the dying, drooping form against his own broad breast. Where was the spit of sand, the lonely

duel, now?—the pitiless arm, the bloody rapier, and all the hideous vision of revenge? Gone—vanished—as if it had never been; and, in its stead, a tried, beloved comrade, pale, sinking, prostrate, bleeding helplessly to death.

"Courage, Florian!" whispered Sir George, tenderly. "Lean on me while I stanch the blood. You will pull through yet. We will have you back at the Hill in an hour. D—— it, man! Lady Hamilton shall nurse you herself till you get well!"

A gleam came over the dying face, like a ray of sunlight gilding the close of a bleak winter's day.

"I have never been false," he murmured, "never false really in my heart. I swore to save you, George, life for life, and I have kept my oath. I shall not live to see Lady Hamilton again, but—but—you will tell her that it was *my* body which——"

He turned fainter now, and lay half-propped against the seat he had lately occupied, holding Sir George's hand, and effectually preventing the baronet from taking any further part in the fray.

It is not to be supposed that the two seamen in the back of the coach had been idle witnesses of a

tumult which so exactly coincided with their notions of what they termed "a spree." Protected from the fire of the horsemen by a pile of luggage on its roof, or, as Slap-Jack called it, by the deck-cargo, they had made an excellent defence, and better practice than might have been looked for with a brace of borrowed pistols, apt to hang fire and throw high. The guard, too, after a careful and protracted aim, discharged his blunderbuss, with a loud explosion; and the result of their joint efforts was, that the highwaymen, as the last-named functionary believed them, were beaten off. Blood Humphrey's horse was shot through the flank, though the poor brute made shift to carry his rider swiftly away. Black George had his ankle-bone broken, but managed to gallop across the moor after his comrade, writhing in pain, and with his boot full of blood. Bold lay dead on the ground. There was but one of the assailants left—a well-armed man in a cassock, who had kept somewhat in the back-ground; and *his* horse, too, was badly wounded behind its girths.

Sir George was occupied with Florian, but the others sprang down to take the last of their foes captive; ere they could reach him, however, he had leaped into the bay mare's saddle, and was

urging her over the heather at a pace that promised soon to place him in safety, for the bay mare was the fastest galloper in Yorkshire, and her rider knew it was a race for life and death.

"By heavens, it is Malletort!" exclaimed Sir George, looking up from his charge, at sound of the flying hoofs, to observe something in the fugitive's seat and figure that identified him with the Abbé, and gazing after him so intently, that he did not mark the expression of satisfaction on Florian's pain-stricken face when he learned the other had escaped. "I never thought he could ride so well," muttered the baronet, while he watched the good bay mare speeding steadily over the open, and saw the Frenchman put her straight at a high stone-wall, beyond which he knew, by his own experience, there was a considerable drop into a ravine. The mare jumped it like a deer, and after a time rose the opposite slope at a swifter pace than ever. Sir George could only make her out very indistinctly now, yet something in the headlong manner of her career caused him to fancy she was going without a rider.

He had more important matters to occupy him. It had begun to snow heavily, and Florian was growing weaker every minute. With a dying man

for their freight; with the absence of other passengers; above all, with the prospect of increased difficulty in progression at every yard they advanced, for the sky had darkened and the flakes fell thicker, guard and driver were easily persuaded to turn their horses' heads, and make the best of their way back to Hamilton Hill.

It was but a few miles distant, and Sir George, hoping against hope, tried to persuade himself that if he could only get Florian under his own roof alive, he might be saved.

They were good nurses, that tried campaigner and his two rough, hardy seamen. Tenderly, like women, they stanched the welling life-blood, supported the nerveless, drooping figure, and wiped the froth from the dry, white lips that could no longer speak, but yet made shift to smile. Tenderly, too, they whispered soothing words, in soft, hushed voices, looking blankly in each other's faces for the hope their hearts denied; and thus, slowly, sadly, solemnly, the dark procession laboured back, taking the road they had lately travelled, past the well-known hostelry, and so wearily climbed the long ascent to the grim, looming towers of Hamilton Hill.

Not a word was spoken. Scarce a sound betrayed

their progress. The air was hushed—the flakes fell softly, heavily—the earth lay wrapped in a winding-sheet of snow—and Florian was dead before they reached the house!

CHAPTER XX.

SOLACE.

BAD news proverbially flies apace, and it is strange how soon the intelligence of any catastrophe pervades an entire household.

Though it was towards the small hours of morning that the coach arrived, with its dead freight, at the gates of Hamilton Hill, the whole establishment seemed to arouse itself on the instant, and to become aware, as though by instinct, that something had occurred productive of general confusion and dismay.

Cerise, pale and spiritless, was sitting in her bedchamber, over the embers of a dying fire, thinking wearily of her husband, wondering, with aching heart and eyes full of tears, what could be this

shadow that had of late come up between them, and now threatened to darken her whole life.

How she wished, yes, she actually wished now, she had never married him. He would have remembered her then as the girl he might have loved. For his own happiness, she protested, she could give him up readily, cheerfully even, to another woman. Then she reviewed all the women of her acquaintance, without, however, being able to fix on one to whom she could make this sacrifice ungrudgingly. She thought, too, how forlorn she would feel deprived of George. And yet, was she not deprived of him already? Could any separation be more complete than theirs? It was torture to reflect that he could not really have loved her, or it would never have come to this. And to leave her thus, without an opportunity for inquiry or explanation. It was careless, unkind, unpardonable. Better to have been sure of his affection, to have known his last thought was for her, and to have seen him brought in dead before her very eyes into the house!

A hurried step was on the stair, a trembling hand flung open the door, and Lady Hamilton's maid rushed into the room, pale, scared, and incoherent, to exclaim:

"Oh! my lady—my lady! Whatever are we to do! The coach has been robbed, and they've brought him back home! They're carrying him up the front stairs now. Stone dead, my lady! He never spoke, Ralph says, nor moved after the shot. Such a home-coming! such a home-coming! Oh dear! oh dear!"

Lady Hamilton's jaw dropped, and her whole face stiffened, as if she had been shot herself. Then she wailed out, "He was angry with me when he went away," repeating the same words over and over again, as though attaching no meaning to the sounds, and staggering, with hands extended, like a blind woman, to the staircase, while, numbed and palsied, as it was by the cruel pain, a silent prayer went out from her heart that she might die.

A strong form caught her in its arms, and she looked up in her husband's face, living, unhurt, and kindly; but saddened with a grave and sorrowing expression she had never seen there before.

"Cerise," he whispered, "a great grief has come upon us. There has been a skirmish on the moor, and Florian, poor Florian, has lost his life."

She was sobbing in his embrace, sobbing with an intense and fearful joy.

"Thank God!" she gasped, putting her hair back

from her white face, and devouring him with wild, loving eyes. "Darling, they told me it was *you*—they told me it was *you*."

Nearer, nearer, he clasped her, and a tear stole down his cheek. It was *him*, then, all the time she had loved with her whole heart *in spite* of his being her husband. It was for his departure she had been grieving in patient silence; it was his displeasure, and no unhallowed fondness for another, that had lately dimmed the soft blue eyes, and turned the sweet face so pale.

"My love!" he whispered; but, notwithstanding his past suspicions, his injustice, his cruel condemnation, this seemed all the amends he was disposed to make; for he went on to tell her how the coach had been beset, and how he must himself have been killed, but for Florian's self-devotion. Florian, who was now lying dead in the very room that had lately come to be called his own.

She wanted no explanation, no apology. She had forgiven him long before he spoke. She had thought him estranged; she had believed him dead; and now he was alive again, and he was her own.

"I care not! I care not!" she exclaimed, wildly. "Let them live or die; what is it to me, so that

you are safe? Shame on me," she added, with more composure, "how selfish I am—how heartless! Let us go to him, George, and see if nothing can be done."

Nothing could be done, of course. Hand in hand, husband and wife visited the chamber of death, hand in hand they left it, with saddened faces and slow, reverential step. But Sir George never forgot the lesson of that night; never again doubted the woman who had given him her whole heart; nor joined in the sneer of those who protest that purity and self-sacrifice are incompatible with earthly love.

But for the snow, Madame de Montmirail would have left Hamilton Hill next day. It was delightful, no doubt, to witness the perfect understanding, the mutual confidence, that had been re-established between Cerise and her husband; but it was not amusing. "Gratifying, but a little wearisome," said the Marquise to herself, while she looked from her window on the smooth undulating expanse of white that forbade the prospect of travelling till there should come a thaw. Never perhaps in her whole life had this lady so much felt the want of excitement, intrigue, business, dissipation, even danger, to take her out of herself, as she expressed it, and preserve the blood from stagnating in her

veins. It is only doing her justice also to state that she was somewhat anxious about Malletort. With half a yard of snow on the ground, however, not to mention drifts, it was hopeless to speculate on any subject out of doors till the weather changed.

For Slap-Jack, nevertheless, whose whole life had been passed in conflict with the elements, even a heavy fall of snow seemed but a trifling obstacle, easily to be overcome, and on no account to interfere with so important a ceremony as a seaman's wedding. Assisted by his shipmate, who had consented to officiate as "best man" on the occasion, he set to work, "with a will," so he expressed it, and cleared away a path four feet broad from the Hill to the "Hamilton Arms." Down this path he proceeded in great state to be married, on the very day the thaw set in, attended by Sir George and Lady Hamilton, the Marquise, Smoke Jack, and all the servants of the establishment. Ere the ceremony was accomplished, the wind blew high and the rain fell in torrents, omens to which the old foretop-man paid not the slightest attention, but of which his best man skilfully availed himself to congratulate the bridegroom on his choice.

"It looks dirty to windward," he proclaimed, in a confidential whisper, heard by the whole company;

"and a chap ain't got overmuch sea-room when he's spliced. But she's weatherly, mate; that's what *she* is—wholesome and weatherly. I knows the trim on 'em."

At a later period in the afternoon, however, when I am sorry to say, he had become more than slightly inebriated, Smoke Jack was heard to express an equally flattering opinion as to the qualities, "wholesome and weatherly," of Mrs. Dodge, not concealing his intention of making a return voyage, "in ballast o' coorse," as he strongly insisted, to these latitudes, when he had delivered a cargo in London. Shrewd observers were of opinion, from these compromising remarks and other trifling incidents of the day, that it was possible the hostess of the "Hamilton Arms" might be induced to change her name once more, under the irresistible temptation of subjugating so consistent a woman-hater as Smoke Jack.

But in the last century, as in the present, death and marriage trod close on each other's heels. The customers at the "Hamilton Arms" had not done carousing to the health of bride and bridegroom, the wintry day had not yet closed in with a mild, continuous rain, and Smoke Jack was in the middle of an interminable forecastle yarn, when a couple of

labouring men brought in the body of a darkly-clad foreign gentleman, who had lately been lodging at this roadside hostelry. They had found him half covered by a waning snow-wreath just under the wall in the "stell," said these honest dalesmen, below Borrodaile Rise. He must have been dead for days, but there was no difficulty in identifying the Abbé, for the frozen element in which he was wrapped had kept off the very taint of death, and preserved him, to use their own language, "in oncommon fettle, to be sure!" Except the Marquise, I doubt if any one regretted him, and yet it seemed a strange and piteous fate for the gifted scholar, the able churchman, the polished courtier, thus to perish by breaking his neck off a Yorkshire mare on a Yorkshire moor.

"Men are so different!" observed Cerise, as she and George discussed the Abbé's death, and, indeed, his character, walking together through the park, after the snow was gone, in the soft air of a mild winter's day, nowhere so calm and peaceful as in our English climate.

"And women, too," replied George, looking fondly in the dear face he had loved all his life, and thinking that her like could only be found amongst the angels in heaven.

Cerise shook her head.

"You know nothing about us," said she. "My own, how blind you must have been when you went away and left me nothing of your cruel self but a riding-glove."

He laughed, no doubt well pleased.

"It was you, then, who had taken it? I looked for it everywhere, and was forced to go away without it."

"You did not look *here*," she answered, and warm from the whitest bosom in the world she drew the missing glove that had lain there ever since the night he left her.

"George," she added, and the love-light in her eyes betrayed her feelings no less than the low, soft accents of her voice. "You know now that I prize your little finger more than all the rest of the world. I never saw another face than yours that I cared twice to look upon, and it is my happiness, my pride, to think that I was never loved by any man on earth but *you!*"

She raised her head and looked around in triumph while she spoke. Her eye, resting on the church of the distant village, caught a gleam of white from a newly-raised tombstone amongst its graves. An old man wrapping up his tools was in the act of

leaving that stone, for he had finished his task. It was but to cut the following inscription:

FLORIAN DE ST. CROIX.

R. I. P.

THE END.

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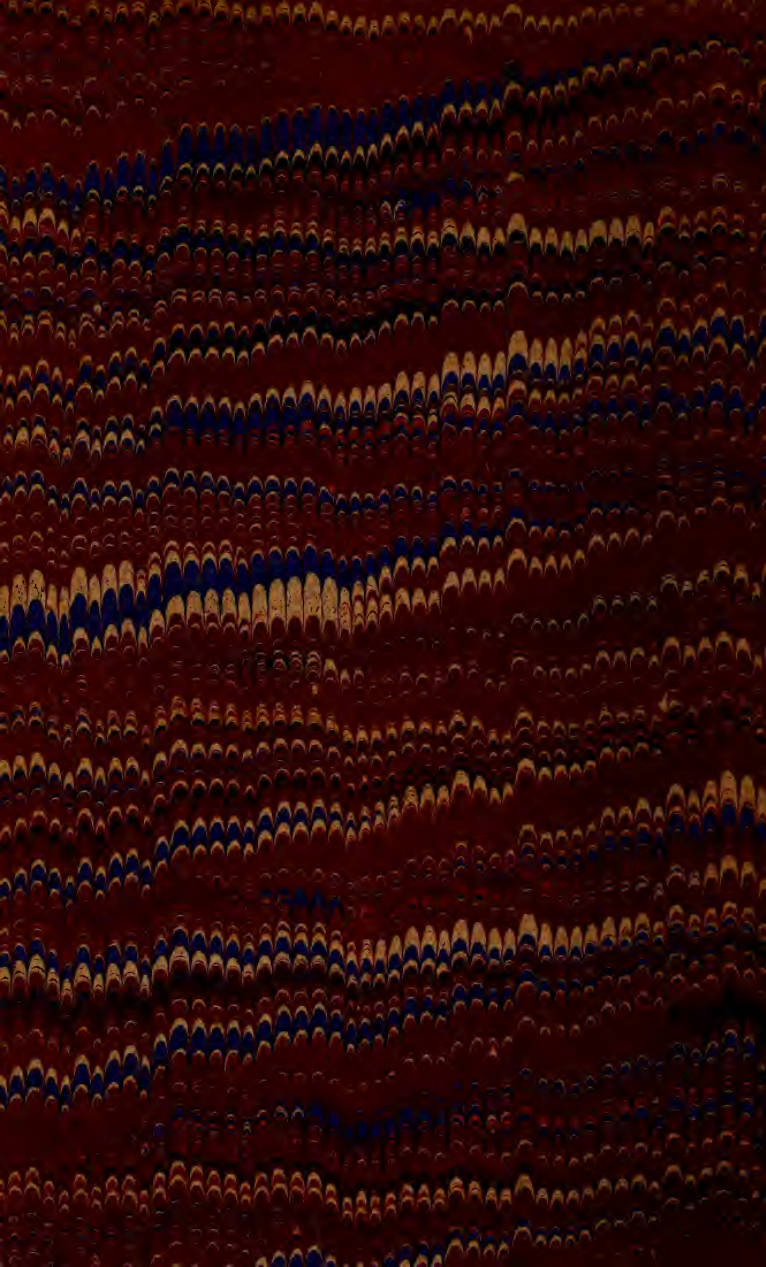

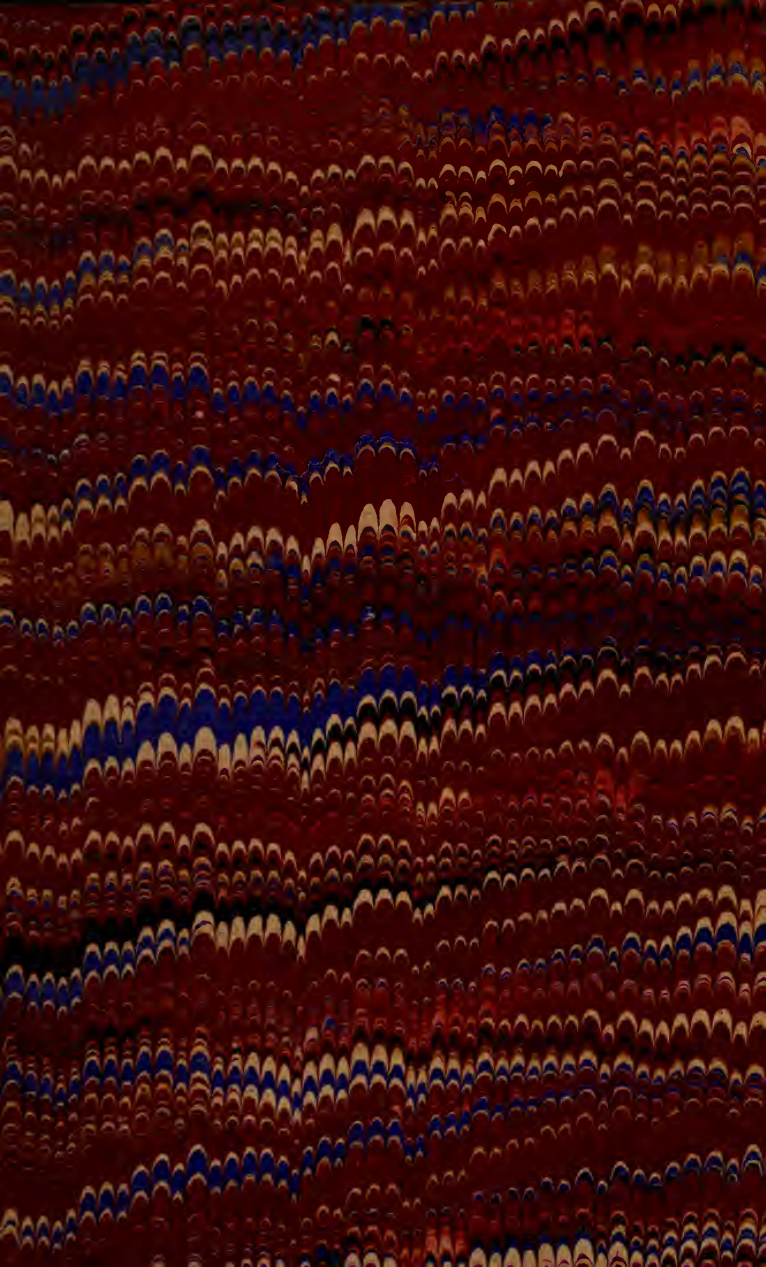

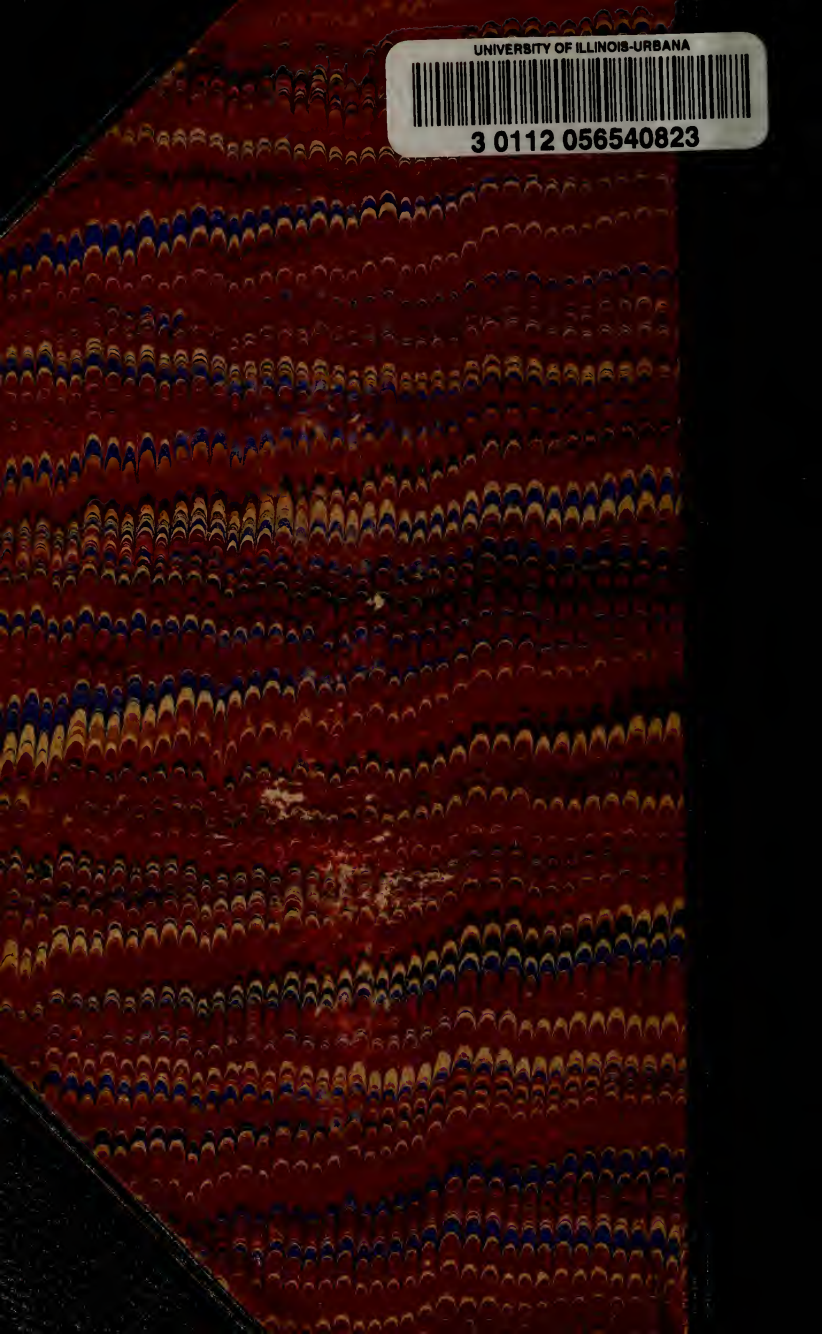
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